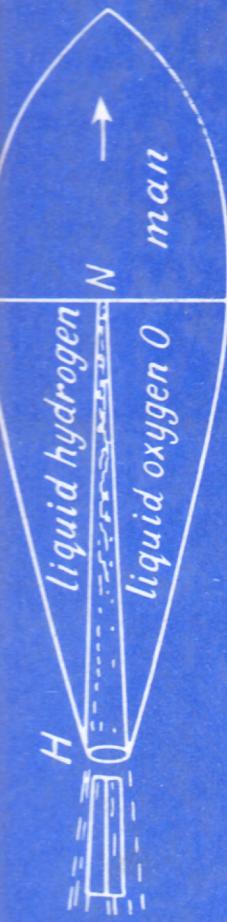


Viktor Sinitsyn

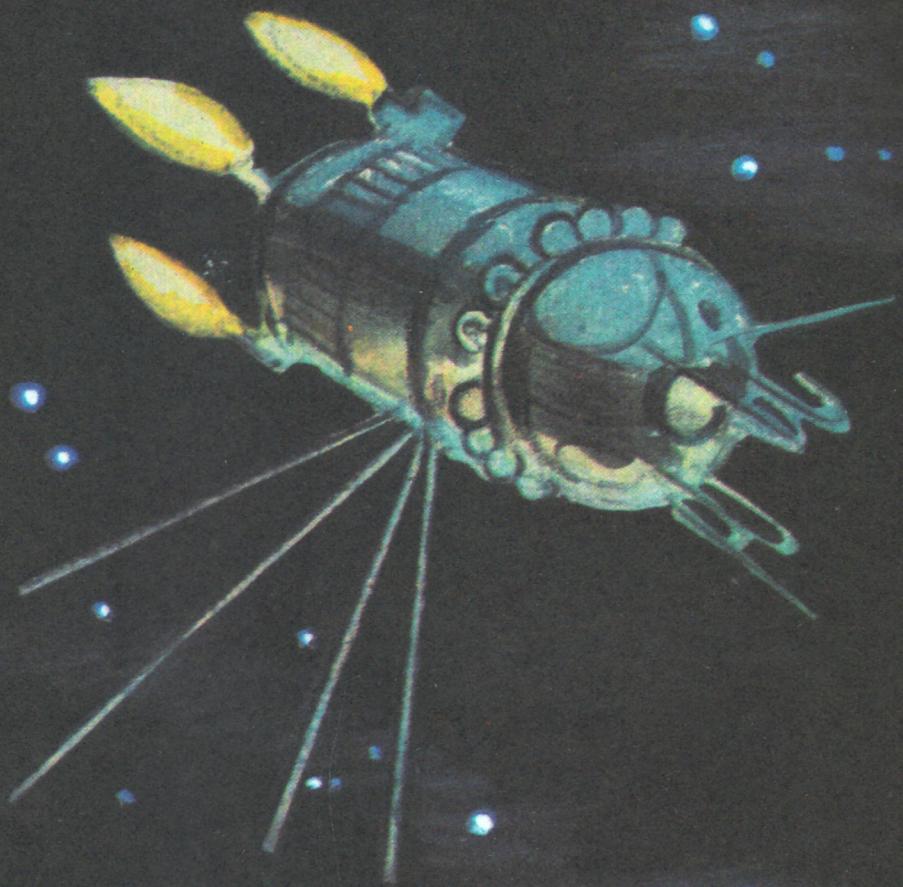


THE FIRST COSMONAUT

MALYSH PUBLISHERS









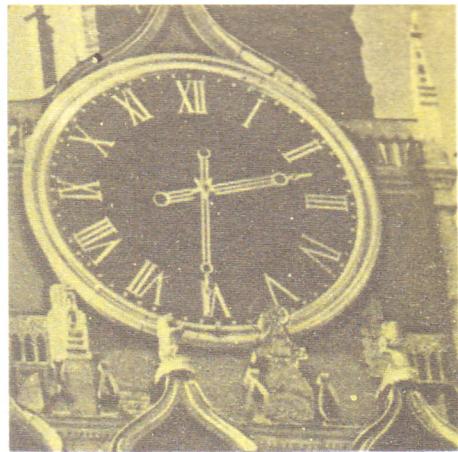


Viktor Sinitsyn



*Illustrated by
Yuri Kopeiko*





RED SQUARE

It was snowing in powdery, biting flakes, whirling and dancing in the light of the street lamps, borne away by a swift wind. And yet it felt like spring. The pavements glittered with the first puddles. The wind blew south and warm.

A young air force senior-lieutenant was walking along Gorky Street, past the building of the Moscow City Hall, and on towards Red Square.

Red Square! Everyone visiting Moscow comes to this place. To have a look at the ruby stars on the Kremlin towers, to take a walk around the Kremlin and pay a visit to Lenin's Mausoleum.

That evening the square was crowded. As always, there were sentries at the doors of the Mausoleum. The silvery fir trees by the Kremlin wall stood in majestic silence.

Suddenly, there came the sound of the chimes from the Spassky Tower. By now the lieutenant had crossed the square and stopped to watch the changing of the guard.

The moment the tower clock boomed soldiers came marching up to the Mausoleum. The commander of the guard shouted out an order. The sentries at the doors took a step towards each other, making way for the new guards. These stepped forward, paused for a moment, then sharply turned on their heels and froze. The replaced sentries simultaneously shouldered their rifles and, executing a smart turnabout, marched down the steps.

The officer stood watching, with his hand raised in salute. He looked very smart in his new military cap and coat.

The guards marched away and the pilot lowered his hand. He was smiling thoughtfully.

Standing here by the Mausoleum, he remembered a photo of Lenin taken at one of the first military parades on Red Square.

His head thrown back and eyes narrowed, Lenin was watching a small airplane... The plane represented the whole of the air force of the young Soviet Republic at that parade.

What was Lenin thinking at that moment, he wondered. He must have been looking forward to a time when planes would fly much faster and higher. But perhaps he saw still further ahead. Perhaps he was thinking of a day when man would venture into space.

Suddenly there was a beating of wings, the sound of cleft air as a flock of pigeons flew up into the sky.

"Oh, how beautiful!" the officer smiled, watching them soaring overhead. "How wonderful it is to fly!" How well he knew the joy of flying.

All around him were people, people talking and laughing. No one took any notice of him, no one knew that this was Yuri Gagarin.

* * *

It was quite dark when Yuri returned to Zvyozdny (Startown). The house was asleep; only in one or two windows were the lights still burning. He tiptoed up to his floor, noiselessly opened the door and, stepping into the darkness, took off his greatcoat. There was a light in the kitchen. Valentina was waiting up for him.

"Where've you been?" she asked anxiously.

He put his finger to his lips, then without a word took off his boots and tiptoed into the bedroom. His elder daughter Lena was fast asleep, with her blanket half on the floor. In the next bed was her baby-sister Galya, her tiny nose barely visible from under the covers, making funny little noises. He stood for a moment, watching the scene, then smiled happily, straightened the blanket and went back to the kitchen.

"Will you pack my suitcase?" he said softly. "I'm flying tomorrow morning."

"Are you going for long?"

"No," he smiled thoughtfully, "only there and back." He paused for a while, then, glancing at his wife, added, "You know, Valya, I was on Red Square."

Valentina looked at him closely.

"An important mission, is it?"

He nodded excitedly.

"I see," she smiled knowingly. "So, that's why you're beaming?"

Early in the morning Gagarin was at the airport.

ON THE WAY TO THE LAUNCH AREA

He was not alone. There were his fellow-pilots, scientists, engineers.

The newsmen were all excited. They had been told that a rocket was going to be launched into space. But what kind of a rocket? That they didn't know. Nor did they know that these young cheerful pilots were the ones who would soon fly into space. Who would have thought that among them there was the man who was later to become the world's first cosmonaut?

At the airport the spacemen-to-be were greeted by lieutenant-general Nikolai Kamanin, one of the first Heroes of the Soviet Union, who together with Mikhail Vodopyanov and some other pilots had rescued the ice-bound Chelyuskin crew. That was in 1933.

And now three dazzlingly white IL-14 stood ready for take-off. The crews were making the final checks. The future cosmonauts, the scientists and the engineers were flying to the Baikonur launching site.

It had been snowing all night, and now it was still snowing slightly. The runways were cleared. They were edged by heaps of snow.



*Lieutenant-General Nikolai Kamanin with cosmonauts
Yuri Gagarin, Gherman Titov and Andrian Nikolayev
selected for the first space flight*

The general looked back at the pilots. There they were, talking and laughing cheerfully. They were obviously in good spirits. And yet Doctor Karpov kept on with his how-do-you-feel questions, scrutinizing the cosmonauts' faces. Kamanin looked at his watch.

"Time to go," he said in a low voice.

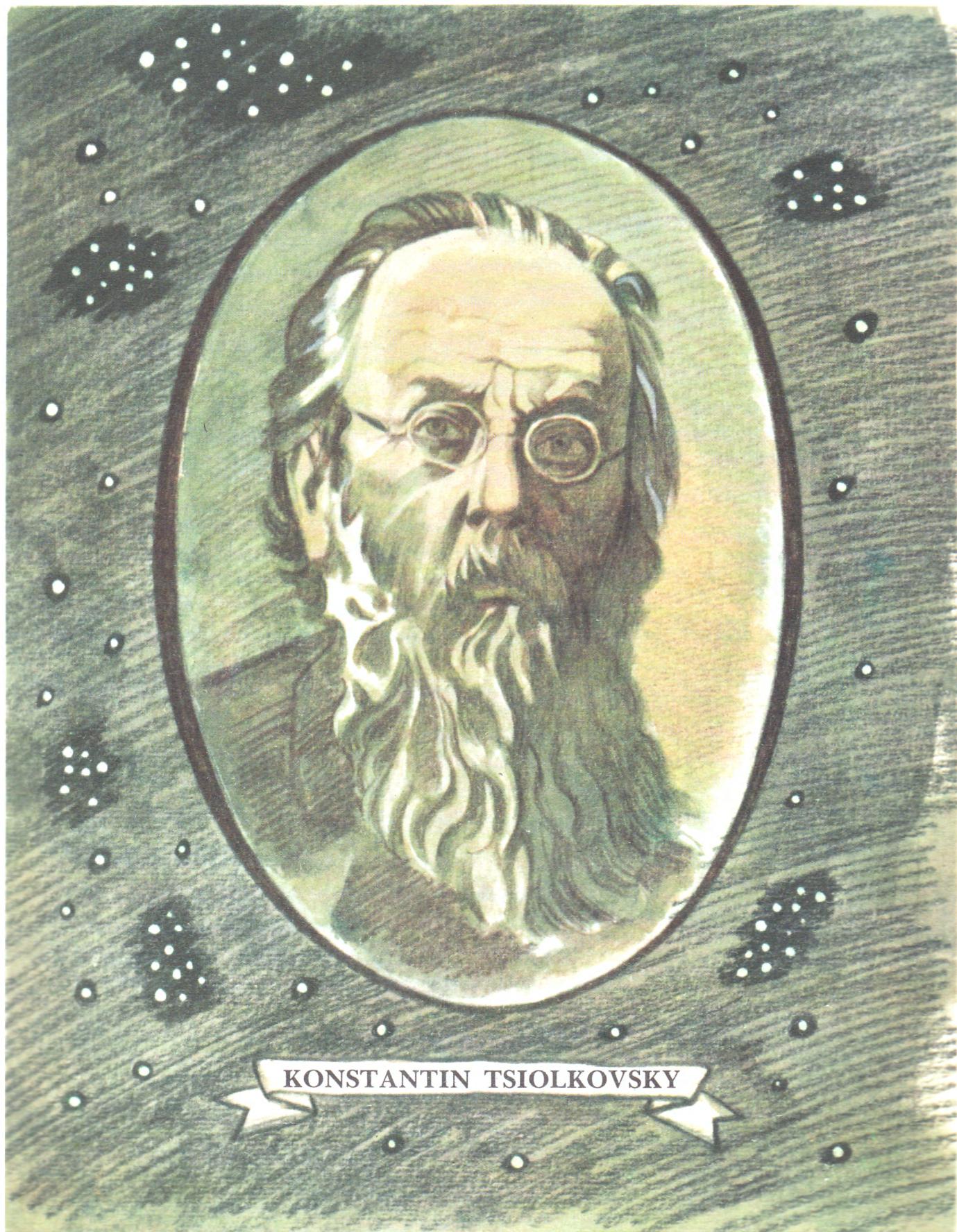
They headed for their planes.

"A safe landing to you!" came from somebody in the crowd that was seeing them off.

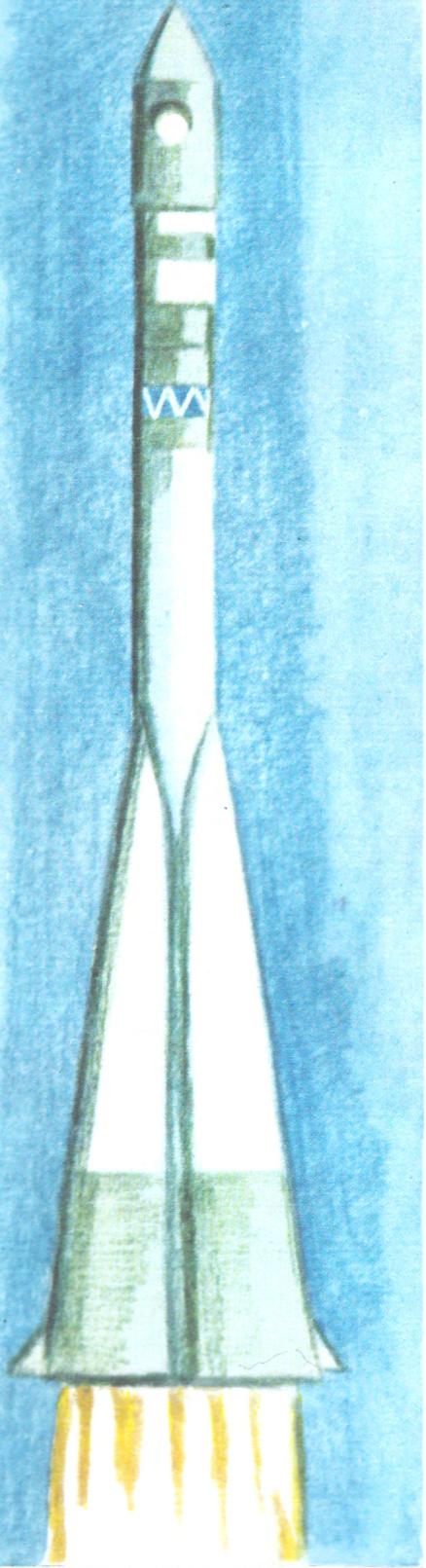
The ramps were removed. The engines roared. One by one, the planes started towards their runways, raising clouds of snowdust. The first one took off and, followed by the two others, began to pick up speed, climbing higher and higher. After turning a semi-circle over the airfield, the planes set off on their course.

In Moscow the general had been told that he was to recommend a pilot and his standby to the State Commission for the first space flight. Now he was turning the problem over and over in his mind. During the training sessions he had had enough time to get to know the pilots. He had grown used to these brave, cheerful lads. Which one of them was to make the first manned space flight? That he was quite at a loss to decide. And he frowned every time he thought about it.

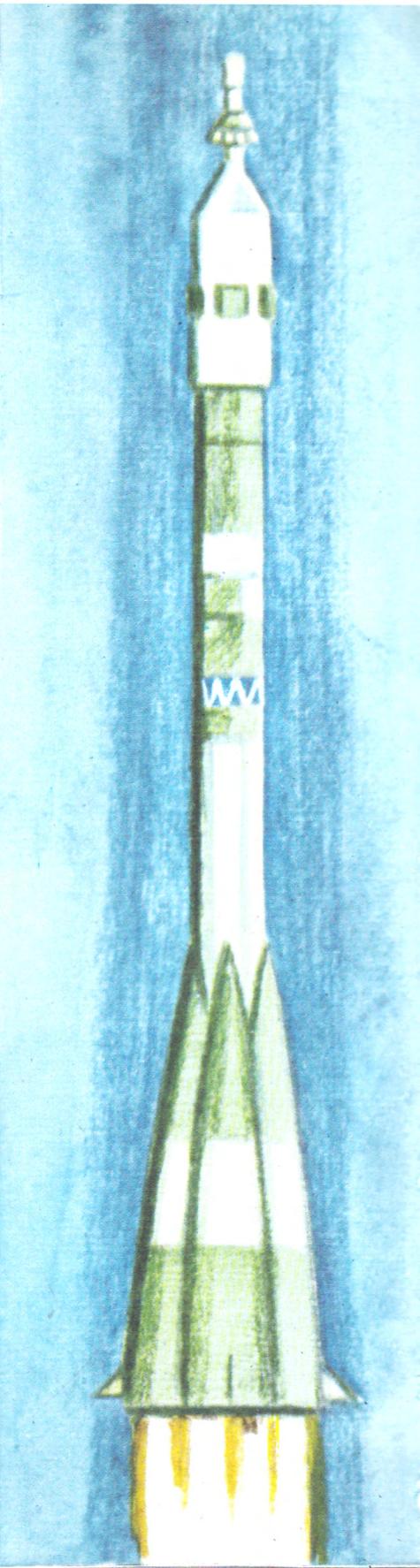
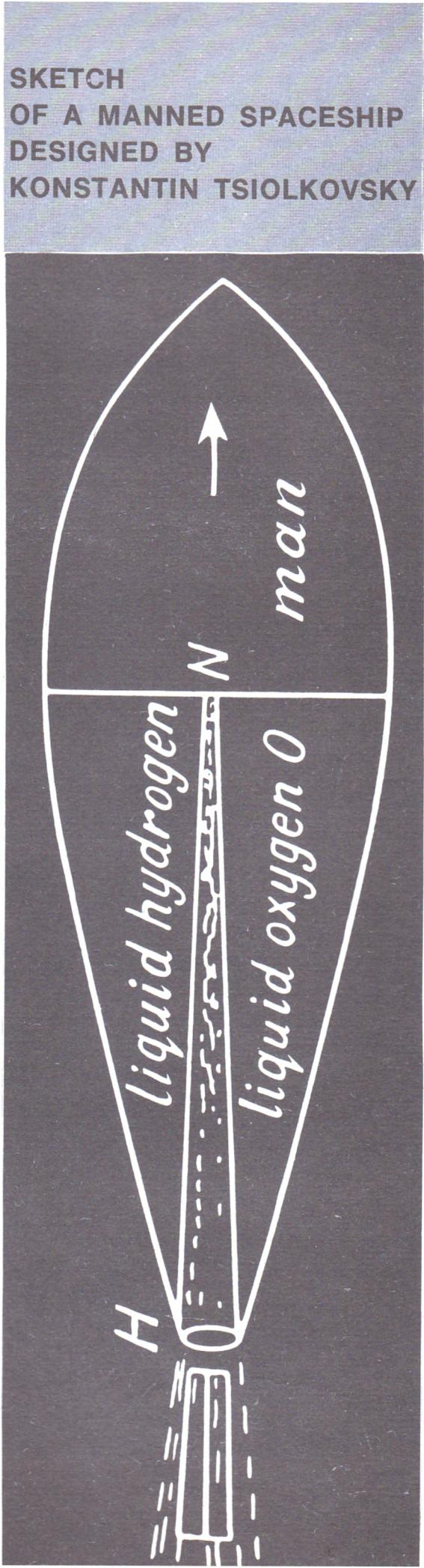
He looked at Pavel Popovich—an ace fighter pilot, smart and always cheerful. There he sat, telling funny stories. The young men roared with laughter, while Popovich looked innocently around, as if it were somebody else who had made them laugh. "What's it all about? Why're you laughing?" he seemed to be asking.



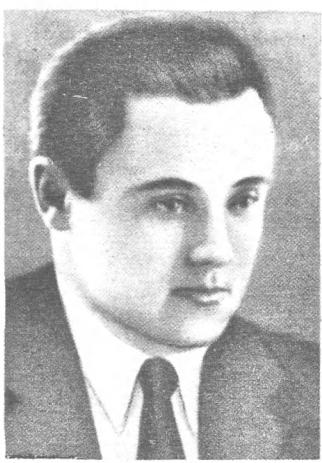
KONSTANTIN TSIOLKOVSKY



THE VOSTOK SPACESHIP
WITH ITS
BOOSTER ROCKET



THE SOYUZ SPACESHIP
WITH ITS BOOSTER
ROCKET



Soviet pioneers of rocketry.

Left to right: Frederick Tsander, Yuri Kondratyuk, Sergei Korolyov, Valentin Glushko





"Or take Andrian Nikolayev, for example..." Kamanin went on. "He was born in Chuvashia, on the Volga. Once as he was flying his fighter, something went wrong with one of the engines. But Andrian wouldn't leave his craft. He managed quite well by himself to land the plane safely.

"Or Gherman Titov... He came from a teacher's family from the Altai region. As a boy, he became interested in aviation, joined a flying club, then studied at an air force school. A skilled, determined, shrewd fellow... Which one of them?..." And the general sighed.

Gagarin was looking through the porthole. Beneath were clouds, blindingly white in the brilliant sunshine.

The farther they flew the more evident was the coming of spring. The snow was no longer white and fleecy, and bare patches of earth were visible. The rivers and lakes had spread beyond the ice and lay glittering with sunny flood-water. The plane raced on and on. Forests, fields, roads, villages flashed by and were lost to view.

Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of something familiar. It reminded him of Klushino, his native village. Gagarin leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes.

Home. He remembered it clearly. It seemed as if it had been just a few days ago.

EARLY YEARS

There are bright patches of sunlight on the rickety porch. A big fly is busily running across, snouting its way ahead. Suddenly it buzzes into the air but in a moment comes back again, flashing emerald in the sun.

A white hen clammers up onto the bottom porch step. It turns its red eye on Yuri and clucks out: "Ko-ko-kok", its crimson crest trembling slightly.

From the shed in the backyard comes the rasping of a saw and the bitter-sweet smell of pinewood shavings. That is father doing some carpentry for the neighbours. Beside him, leaning on the carpenter's bench, is Valentin, Yuri's elder brother. He is absorbed in watching.

Father is hot. There is a moist spot on his shirt between his shoulder blades. Now he brushes beads of sweat off his forehead and straightens up.

"Look, this wood's not dry enough," he says to his son, picking

some shavings from the plane. "You knock two boards like this together, and they'll soon dry up and warp."

"Please, Daddy, let me shave one side," Valentin pleads. "Just one side. Don't you worry. I'll shave it alright."

Father chuckles and gives him the plane. Then he limps away from the carpenter's bench and sits down on a block of wood.

"Don't press so hard, don't press..." he commands. "Right. See it's much easier this way?"

He gets out his tobacco-pouch, deftly rolls himself a cigarette, then wearily looks around, smoothing down his straight, stiff hair.

"Ugh! This heat... What a scorcher of a summer! All we need now is a good rain. The crops are coming on nicely, but the stalks are still too weak. They are desperate for rain."

Yuri is sitting on the upper step of the porch. His big sister Zoya is writing something in her notebook. From time to time Yuri glances at her and sighs. He wishes she'd finish her homework. She's promised to give him a reading lesson.

At long last Zoya takes the ABC and points at a picture. Every picture in the book is a letter. Two letters make a syllable. A couple of syllables makes a word. How wonderful!

"Look, these two letters spell 'Ma'," Zoya explains. "Now read, 'Ma-ma, moth, mittens', see!"

Yuri listens attentively, his lips slowly forming the words; his eyelashes and eyebrows quivering, while the gentle breeze stirs his flaxen hair.

The lesson is over. Yuri turns his bright blue eyes on his sister and says in a pleading tone, "A little bit more, please, Zoya. Let's go on, eh?"

His little brother Borya is playing with blocks of wood. He crawls about the floor, mumbling and puffing.

Behind the house is a garden. The apple and cherry trees are in full blossom, all hazy white, alive with the hum of bees. The breeze wafts the sweet scent of black-currents.

Behind the garden lies a vast water-meadow full of white flowers. A noisy crowd of children run around there, playing *lapti*. Still farther beyond stretches hilly country. The slopes are patched with fields, scattered with birch and aspen groves.

There is space. Breathing space. It makes you want to stand here for hours on end, gazing out at the beautiful view. How pleasant it is to watch and stare! The lush green of the grass and leaves, the hills and dales bathed in the bright sunlight.

A small stream winds its way through the marshy meadow, flanked by thickets of osiers. On either bank, sloping down to the water's edge, are trees and log huts. Klushino is a big village.

A merry, ringing clamour of voices rises from the meadow.



*Yuri Gagarin with his parents,
Anna Timofeyevna and Alexey Ivanovich*



*The house in the village of Klushino
where Yuri Gagarin was born*

Yuri looks up at Zoya and sighs.

She is still busy. If only he could write as quickly as Zoya does. If only time would move a bit faster. He so wants to go to school. They learn so many things there. History, geography, maths, physics. They are called subjects. He has heard his elder brother and sister talk about these things. They are always talking about them.

Not far from their house runs a highway. Lorries and cars stream by all day long. Sometimes a driver pulls his truck to the curb to let the engine cool down, and calls out at their wicket-gate, "Hey, folks, there! Would you bring me some water, please?"

Yuri dashes to the house and then back to the stranger, carrying a mug of water. The sun-tanned, dust-grimed driver takes a great gulp, then pours the rest of the water over his sweaty chest.

"Thank you, laddie. This water of yours is something," he says puffing. "I'll give you a ride on my way back. Is it a deal?"

Yuri knows he won't really. But he doesn't mind that. The driver must be awfully pressed for time. Yuri also has got things to do. He's got to weed the vegetable beds in the kitchen garden.

It is only in the evening that the large family assembles. When mother returns from the dairy, father and Valentin are putting away the tools, Borya is placing his blocks under the stove.

"Goodness gracious!" Mother exclaims, throwing up her hands in surprise. "What fine helpers I've got! Supper's ready, the cattle are fed. And who's repaired the gate, I wonder? Could it be Valentin? Oh, Goodness, Zoya's swept out the room."

"It's them... It's all of them, who else!" Father smiles happily.

"And what've my little ones been doing?"



"This Yuri, mummy," Zoya begins to prattle, "he's been badgering me to death with his questions. Teach him this, teach him that. Now he keeps at me about figures, just imagine. He wants to know everything—everything!"

"Why, that's not bad. Good boy, sonnie," says mother, looking at Yuri lovingly. "You'll go to school in the autumn."

In the evenings the house is alive with talk and laughter, especially when father's brother Uncle Pavel drops in. When he comes the children squeal with delight. Uncle is a collective farm vet. That is, he treats sick cows and horses. And oh, how he can tell stories! You can listen to him for hours.

After tea they all go up to the hayloft. From below mother throws them some pillows and blankets. They make themselves comfortable and start asking all sorts of questions: how they work in the factories, what kinds of machines they make there, what other lands and cities look like. The children listen to Uncle Pavel and gaze out into the starry sky.

"Uncle dear, does the sky reach the stars?" Yuri asks.

Uncle Pavel and Valentin roar with laughter.

"And what're stars?" Yuri persists.

"The stars are planets, like the Earth and the Moon," Uncle Pavel explains. "Only they're far, far away. Understand?"

"Yeaah," Yuri laughs back. "Certainly."

"A lot you understand about it," Uncle Pavel sighs. "I see you're still too young to understand such things."

Yuri is dying to ask more and more questions, but Valentin nudges him in the ribs. He's also got something to ask.

"Are there also any people up there?"

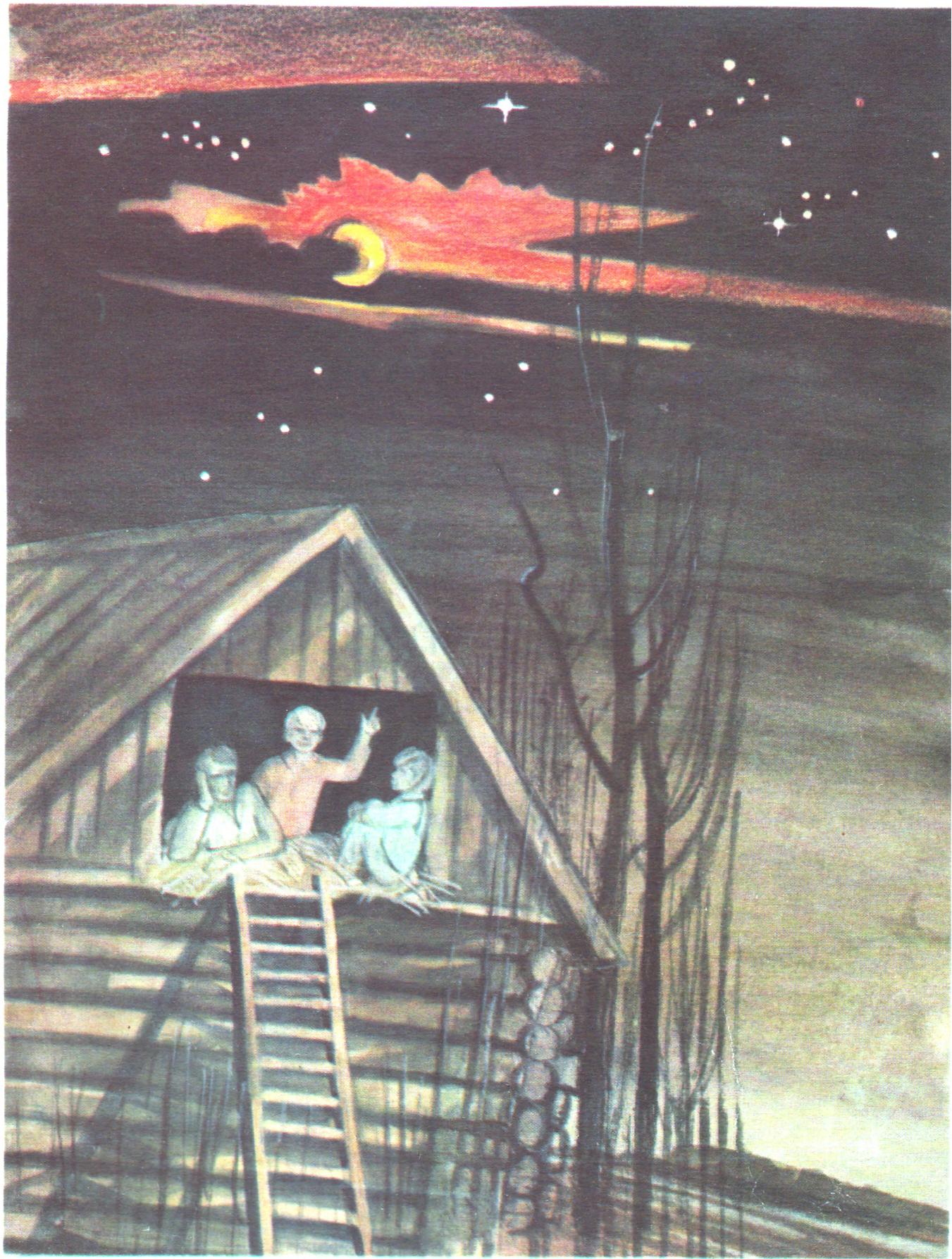
"It's hard to say," Uncle Pavel answers after a moment's thought. "I hate to think there aren't any. The Earth can hardly be the only lucky planet."

Yuri is starting to doze off at his uncle's warm side. He is so sleepy.

WAR

It was a morning in June. Mother and Zoya were busy with their chores in the kitchen when suddenly father appeared in the doorway. They had never seen him so anxious, pale and dismayed.

"War!" was all he could say.



Mother dropped stunned to the bench, covered her face with her apron and burst into tears.

"Our children... What's going to happen to us... Oh, woe..." she sobbed.

Yuri and Borya looked at the grownups with fear. Zoya gave a loud sob and was about to cry but, glancing at father, clasped her hand over her mouth and choked the cry back. At that moment Valentin ran in from the street, but stopped short in the doorway...

Klushino grew quiet. In the morning the first mobilised men from the village left for the front. There were many horse-driven baggage carts. Youths and men marched behind, some with plywood suitcases, some with knapsacks. An accordion was grinding out a jolly, carefree tune. Some sang, others danced, trying to cheer up their folks, but tears stood in everyone's eyes.

That day most of the village menfolk left for the front.

The streets became deserted. The youngsters rarely got out together to play. Most of the time they stayed indoors.

It was quite dark, now, by the time the adults returned home from work. Yuri and Borya were fast asleep. They would drop off to sleep as soon as their heads touched the pillow, exhausted after a long and weary day. The grownups sat down to supper silently. No one felt like talking. The front was coming closer and closer to the village.

Soon refugees appeared in Klushino. An endless stream of trucks and horse-driven carts loaded with household goods. Women, children, old people trudged beside. Threatened by the enemy, they had been forced to abandon their homes.

Mother and Zoya used to go to the road with bread, boiled potatoes and water and give them to the passing refugees.

Yuri and Valentin would stand for hours at the wicket-gate, watching gloomily. Valentin kept silent, his brows knit in a frown. Yuri gave him no peace, showering him with questions.

"Where're they going? Are we going to leave too?"

"Keep quiet," Valentin would stop him.

So they would stand, sad and silent, looking at the crowds of tired refugees moving along the road.

THE FIRST LESSON

The night before he started school Yuri had a strange dream. He saw his little brother Borya sneak out of his bed and steal up

to Yuri's schoolbag. And then, how strange, he opened it and pulled out two notebooks, which Zoya had given Yuri the day before. What does he want to do with my notebooks, Yuri wondered. Oh, it looks like he's going to draw pictures in them! He screamed and made to grab his treasure...

Suddenly he woke up and saw Zoya standing over him. She was shaking him by the shoulder, whispering softly, "Yuri, get up. You'll be late for school."

School! He jumped out of bed and, snatching up his shirt and trousers, began to dress quickly. Quick! Quick! His heart was throbbing with joy. He'd been waiting so long for this day.

At breakfast he couldn't keep still for a moment, fidgeting with impatience, now looking out of the window to see if his mates were already going to school, or turning round to glance at the clock on the wall.

"Stop this fidgeting, you little devil!" Zoya said angrily. "Finish your milk and then we'll go."

The sound of father's axe was heard in the backyard. Mother was busy cooking at the stove.

"Isn't it time yet?" Yuri said, pulling at Zoya's sleeve. "Hurry up, please."

At the door mother came up to him, took him into her arms and said,

"Well, my little dear, I wish you good luck. Goodness, how time flies! You're a big boy now."

Outside, Father came up to Yuri, looked him from head to foot and said sternly,

"Now, son, behave yourself. Obey your teacher. Mind and do what she says. Don't be lazy." With that he gave him a slight push and added curtly: "Off you go now."

Zoya took Yuri's hand and they went out into the street.

The day was warm but dull and overcast. The sky hung low, and faraway over the horizon black clouds rolled, brushing the hills and groves. A column of soldiers was marching down the road. Green-painted trucks rumbled past. The soldiers turned their heads to look at the children and their faces lit up in a smile.

Zoya showed Yuri to his classroom. There he saw many of his playmates, with whom he used to run in the meadow and swim in the river by the village.

Now they were all schoolchildren. Clean and neat, they timidly took their seats at the desks. Through the windows, they could see the grownups watching them anxiously, their faces pressed against the window-panes.

From a portrait over the blackboard Lenin looked down at the children with a warm smile.



The teacher entered the classroom. She greeted the class with the words:

"Children, today's a big day for you. You've started school. True, this day's come to you in hard times. There's a war on, a great patriotic war. Your fathers and older brothers are fighting the enemy. They're defending our Motherland. The front is drawing closer to our village, so anything might happen. By studying well you'll help your fathers and brothers at the frontline."

After the lessons, when they were going home, two airplanes appeared in the sky. One of them was listing heavily on one wing, making for the nearby marsh, just managing to keep above the roof-tops. The other was circling about, climbing sharply, then diving, as if signalling. The girls screamed and ran away, but the boys stayed where they were to see what would happen.

"These are ours! Fighters!" they shouted. "Look, that one's been hit. Oh, it's going to crash."

The damaged fighter, its engines spluttering wildly, passed over the houses of Klushino, coming down in a steep dive. The boys dashed after it and found it lying in a hollow, with one wing lodged deeply into the grass, and its tail stuck up into the air. They caught sight of the pilot limping along to the birch grove. On seeing the children, he stopped and, pointing towards the village, shouted,

"You live over there?"

"Yeah! It's Klushino," the boys chorused.

Just at that moment the second plane roared overhead and was gone, only to come back again. The wounded pilot tore off his helmet and waved it in the air.

"Oh, he's come back! Sonny boy! You needn't worry about me!" he cried.

After making a circle over the marsh, the plane landed and, jolting along over the tussocks, came to a halt at some distance from the crippled fighter. The two pilots embraced each other. The new arrival looked the boys over and asked,

"Is there a telephone in your village?"

"There is one but it's no good," they all hastened to reply. "It's been out of order for days. We'll run to Gzhatsk and tell everything. It's quite near, ten kilometers or so. We always go there on foot."

"Oh, we don't need Gzhatsk," the pilot said with a smile. "What we need is our airfield but it's some hundred kilometers from here."

"Indeed?" the boys gasped in astonishment.

"Well, now, run and fetch some buckets," said one of the pilots after a moment's pause.

The boys sped off to the village and soon returned, each carrying a bucket. The pilots opened the tanks of the damaged fighter and the boys began to carry buckets of fuel to the second plane. When



the tanks were refilled, the pilots shook hands with the youngsters and climbed into the cockpit.

"Thank you, laddies," they said in parting. "You're brave boys. You're sure to grow up to be pilots. Don't you worry. We'll give it hot to the fascists. They'll remember it to their dying day."

The plane spluttered, pulled out and raced along the marsh, but the boys stayed where they were, following it with their eyes. They feared it might not take off. But it did. Climbing higher and higher, the plane dipped its wings in parting and soon turned into a speck faraway in the distance.

THE NAZIS

The Germans burst into the village early in the morning. First the motor-cyclists roared through, shooting in the empty streets as they passed. Then tanks rumbled by, rattling the window-panes. Then came a column of army trucks.

Laughing, shouting, soldiers clustered round the wells, rushed into the yards. Shots crackled all around. They just fired at anything that met their eye—dogs, cats, hens, geese.

All day long German troops marched through the village. One of the units was stationed at Klushino.

The Gagarins were in the kitchen. The day before they'd made up their minds to leave Klushino. Mother had packed their warm clothes, but as bad luck would have it, father fell ill, so they had to stay. Now he had just got up from his bed. He looked pale and troubled; his hands trembled slightly. Zoya and Valentin watched him silently. They were frightened.

Presently they heard the sound of heavy footsteps on the porch and harsh, loud voices talking a foreign language. Then came a clanging of submachine-guns as the voices drew near. A soldier looked into the kitchen, pointed his gun at them and shouted at the top of his voice, "Partisanen? Nein? Puf! Puf!"

With that he burst out laughing and went into the best room. There was a din all over the place, as if the house was being shaken. The Germans had opened the chest and the wardrobe and were rummaging in the Gagarins' belongings, grabbing everything that caught their eye. The soldier reappeared and yelled,

"Milch, ekks! Verstehen? Schneller!"

"What does he want?" Mother said. She could not understand German.

"Don't you see?" Father replied with a snort. "Hungry, what else could he be," and wrinkling his nose disgustedly, added, "you'd better give him something. Let him eat till he bursts."

The soldier went on babbling something in his own language, poking his finger at father's chest. Then suddenly for some reason he got angry and hustled everyone out. Evidently, he didn't like father's snort.

In the yard there were soldiers too. They had broken the fence and parked a truck near the shed. A stout red-necked corporal was shouting orders.

The Gagarins had to spend the night in the vegetable garden, in a haystack. At midnight a cold, drizzling rain started, and father brought spades and called to Valentin,

"We must build a dugout. We can't just sit around like this."

The house was occupied by the Germans. Soldiers came and went but the stout corporal stayed throughout. His name was Albert. His job was to charge car batteries. Yuri wouldn't forget him for a long time afterwards.

At the start of winter came heavy snow and bitter frosts. Yuri and Borya used to dig in the kitchen garden, hoping to find a few of last-year's potatoes. They were starving. The fascists had robbed them of all their food.

One day Borya went up to the shed where Albert was working at the time. There was a light in the workshop; an engine was buzzing, and tools of various kinds were scattered about. It was all so exciting to the youngster.

Albert turned his head and saw the boy. Suddenly, he grabbed Borya by the collar of his coat, picked him up and hung him by his scarf from the branch of an apple-tree. Borya screamed in a small, shrill voice, helplessly jerking his hands and feet.

Yuri was in the garden, a few paces away. The sight that met his eyes made his blood freeze. He tried to shout but couldn't.

The fat corporal stood with his feet wide apart, his hands at his sides, laughing uproariously. Borya was suffocating. His face was turning blue. Mother, hearing him scream, dashed frantically out of the dugout but Albert wouldn't let her come nearer. He snatched out his pistol and pointed it at mother.

Fortunately, at that moment an officer came into the yard and said something to Albert. He didn't give Borya so much as a glance. Albert stood to attention, then clicked his heels together and ran off. Mother seized Borya and, pressing him to her bosom, rushed back to the dugout. They brought him round only with great difficulty.

"Just you wait, you beast," Mother cried in a frenzy. "Just wait till the Red Army comes. You'll get what's coming to you."

"Now, now! Don't cry, Borya," Yuri whispered to his brother, who was shaking with sobs. "They'll pay dearly for this."

One night the children stole into the workshop and pushed some rubbish into the exhaust pipe of the engine. Next morning, when Albert tried to start the machine up, it only coughed and spluttered but wouldn't go. His work came to a halt. A messenger came, then another. Presently Albert's commander appeared and began to shout at the corporal. He even slapped him with his gloves. Albert fussed about, all dishevelled and sweaty, but couldn't find what was wrong.

The Gagarins lived under the Germans for two long years. Life was hard. The fascists were very cruel. Then the Red Army started an offensive and liberated Klushino.

MODEL PLANE

It was only after the Germans had left that Yuri resumed school. The family had moved to Gzhatsk. Mother made a coat and trousers for Yuri out of some old clothes and took her younger sons to school. Yuri began the third form, Borya the second.

The town lay in ruins. Before going away the Nazis had blown up most of the brick buildings.

The school occupied two wooden ramshackle houses.

Children wrote on whatever they could find, using old newspapers. They didn't have proper notebooks. Once somebody brought a roll of faded wallpaper to school. That was a good find. It was cut up into rectangles and sewn together to make exercise books.

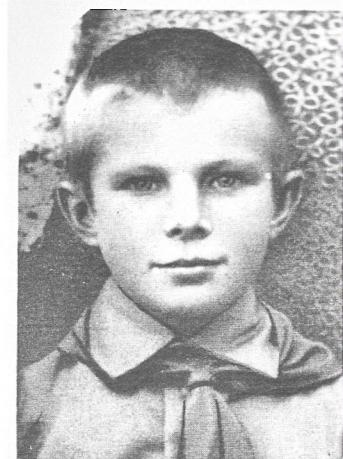
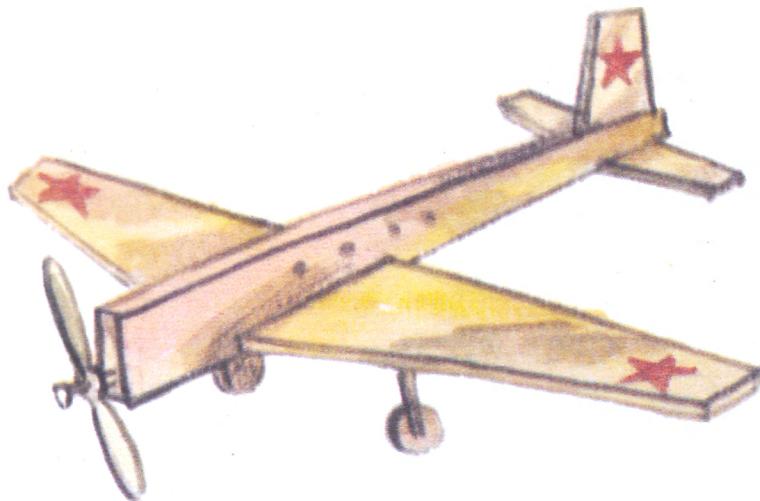
Father made up his mind to take their wooden hut apart and move it from Klushino to Gzhatsk. He got out his tools and set to work.

Once again the scent of pinewood shavings filled the yard.

Yuri also felt like doing a bit of carpentry. But what was there to do? Suddenly he had an idea. He would make a model plane. Exactly like the one that had crashlanded near Klushino.

So he took a piece of board, cut out a groove in it, then fastened another board across the first one. After all, every plane must have wings. Behind the wings he fitted a shorter block. A few finishing touches and the plane was ready. Yuri examined it from all sides. Not just a plane, but a picture.

When he brought it to school, all his classmates crowded round him, marvelling at the strange toy.



Yuri as a member of the Young Pioneer Organization

"Where did you get it?" they wanted to know.

"Why, I made it all by myself," Yuri announced proudly.

"Can it fly?"

"Sure. Only we'll have to launch it from somewhere high."

So they all went up to the first floor and opened the window. Yuri took a run up and threw the plane into the air. The model dived steeply; there was a terrible cracking sound as it fell through the branches of an acacia. After a few moments a man's voice shouted from below, "Just you wait, scoundrels! What's all this stick throwing about?"

The boys tore off in all directions. Scarcely had they run into the classroom when the headmistress appeared. She was accompanied by a stranger, who was carrying Yuri's plane.

"Children," the headmistress said. "Who brought this thing to school and threw it out of the window?"

"Thank God, it wasn't worse," the stranger chimed in, rubbing his forehead, where there was a big bluish lump. "This thing could've broken my head."

A heavy silence fell for a moment. It was Yuri who broke it.

"It's mine," he said, blushing scarlet. "Please, excuse me... I just... I didn't mean it, you know. Only please, give me back my plane."

"Oh no," the headmistress laughed. "That's going too far. We'll keep it in the staff room. Or you'll probably try to launch it again."

Yuri sighed sadly. It was a pity. But what could he say? After all, he was to blame.

HELLO, THE SKIES!

Years passed. After leaving school Yuri went to Saratov to study at an industrial specialised school. At that time he used to go to the children's park and play volleyball there.

One day Vladimir Kashtanov, an instructor at the flying club, joined in the game. He noticed that Yuri was a good player and at the interval came up to him and inquired, "Been playing long?"

"Yes, pretty long. What about you?"

"Me? What a question!" Kashtanov laughed and then added quite seriously, "We can't do without sports."

"What d'you mean by 'we'?"

"Pilots, of course. I'm from the flying club."

Yuri stared in wonder at the stranger. He had only dreamt of an encounter like this.

"And could I join your club?" he asked timidly.

"Why not. Of course, you can," the flying instructor said with a smile. "So you want to fly? How long've you had the idea, I wonder?"

"How long? Well, I always admired pilots. Such brave men that they are... Have you seen the film *Fighters*? Oh, you have! I enjoyed every minute of it."

"Well, then, come to the club if you want to. And then we'll see."

Yuri's first flying instructor was Sergei Martyanov. At their first meeting Martyanov felt no confidence in the young man.

He's too skinny. I'll bet he won't be able to stand a single turn in the air, he thought to himself.

And he took Yuri for his first flight. The plane took off and started doing tricks in the air, now banking steeply in a sudden turn, now rolling and spinning. But strange to say, this boy was in raptures. Not in the least scared or sick.

It was a long flight. At length even Martyanov felt tired.

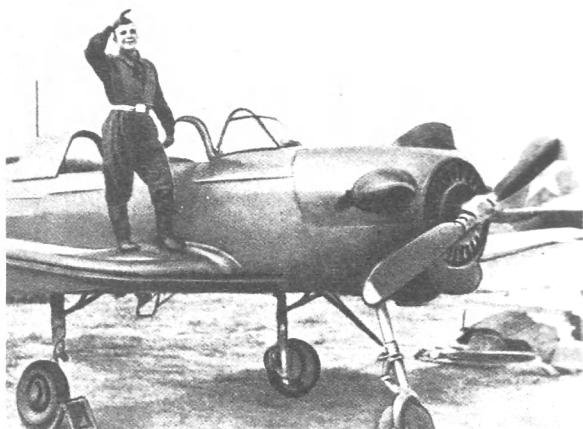
Next morning, to his surprise, he found Yuri shivering with cold, waiting for him at the gates of the flying club.

And so it was every day from then onwards.

Flights began at 4 o'clock in the morning. To get to the airport, Yuri had to cross the whole length of the town. He hardly ever got any sleep.

Flying was everything to him, and soon his instructor became aware of this. True, it was not all plain sailing.

Before undergoing the piloting tests the club's trainees were sent to a remote airfield. Yuri couldn't join them since he had to present



*Yuri Gagarin doing his practical work as a student of a vocational school.
Student of the Saratov industrial specialised school*

Before a training flight

his graduation paper at the industrial school. When he arrived, the training flights were drawing to an end. It turned out that Yuri had some problems with landing. The exams were approaching but every time he tried he failed to land properly.

The wing commander decided to dismiss Yuri from the club. Though a cheerful, sociable man, Gagarin now avoided his friends. In the evenings he would go for long walks out in the fields and woods alone. Over and over again, dozens, hundreds of times he reviewed his piloting technique, trying to discover his errors. But he couldn't find out what was wrong.

The air-unit commander came to his aid. He suggested they fly together.

The commander followed every movement of his trainee. The plane was coming in for a landing when suddenly he ordered Gagarin to pull it out of its dive and take it upwards. Yuri pulled the control column. He felt awfully nervous.

"Come on!" the commander ordered. "Why're you so tense? Scared? Then, what's the matter with you? Come on, find the correct height."

The commander's composure communicated itself to Yuri. He found the correct height quickly.

"Right. Now bring her lower. Still lower! Fine! Now let's land," the commander encouraged him.

Yuri passed with distinction and as one of the best cadets was sent on to the Orenburg air force school.





THE PATH TO THE STRATOSPHERE

After finishing the Orenburg school, Yuri was attached to an air force unit stationed in the Polar region. The young pilot found himself in difficult conditions. There were squalls, snowdrifts and low clouds, which made flying hard going. His days in the North were packed with new experiences for him.

It was then that the first Soviet sputniks /artificial satellites/ were being launched into space. Gagarin and his friend Yuri Dergunov would eagerly discuss the events.

"You know, Yuri," Dergunov said one day. "Let's try our luck. A team of cosmonauts is not just an empty dream. I think we ought to apply to be enrolled in it. Just imagine! A journey to some distant planet."

Gagarin wrote an application and handed it in to the squadron commander. The latter was most surprised.

"Seems to me, you're in too much of a hurry about it, eh, lieutenant?"

"I'm not," Yuri replied firmly. "I think it's high time."

He hadn't long to wait. One day he was called to the commander's office. There he saw a colonel he'd never met before, who was looking through his personal papers.

"Ah, take a seat," the stranger smiled. "Well, tell me a few words about yourself: your life, friends, studies... your parents."

Gagarin told him.

"And how would you like to test new aircraft?" the colonel asked. There it was! Yuri's heart gave a thump.

"Oh, I'd be glad to," he said, jumping to his feet.

"Good," nodded the colonel. "But mind, not a word to anybody about it. We'll let you know as soon as we want you."

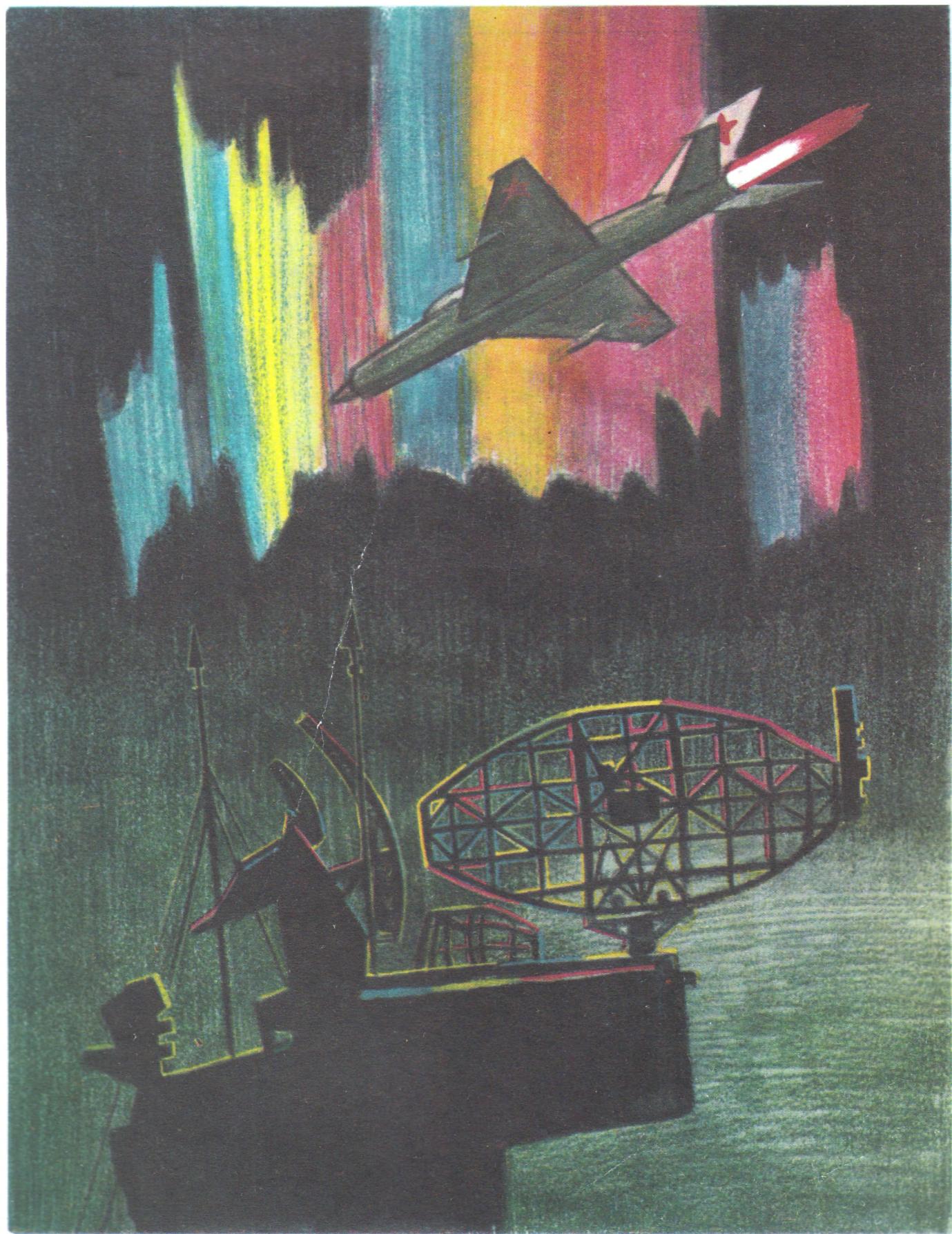
Soon after Gagarin was summoned to Moscow. When he arrived, however, he was unexpectedly sent to a hospital. There was a pilot captain in his ward, who repeated indignantly,

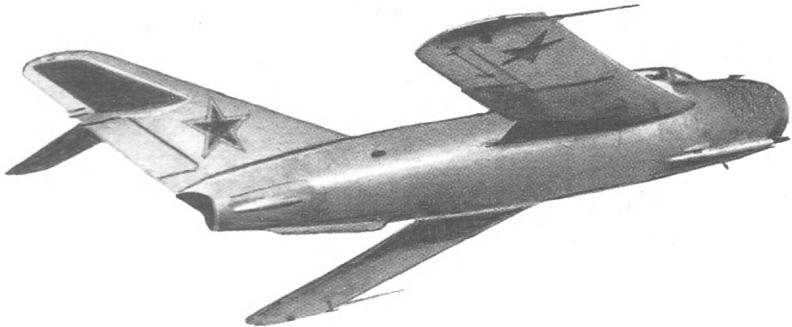
"A fine state of affairs! We've come here to fly, haven't we? What've we got to do with all this rubbish—these test-and-measuring things, checkups and the like? I'm fit as a fiddle, and they... How d'you feel about it, lieutenant?"

"Take it easy, old man," Yuri would say soothingly. "No other way, I reckon."

Pilots are quite accustomed to medical checkups. But here everything was so unusual. They were made to read special tables, measured, tested in chambers and what not.

One day when the checkup was over, Yuri came for his papers. His ward-mate was in the waiting room. His eyes were sad.





Gagarin as a cadet of the Orenburg air force school

"Have you been called in yet?" Gagarin asked, sitting down beside.

"Rejected," the captain sighed. "I've just had a talk with a doctor. Not such a bad chap in his way. You know what he said? 'Don't be angry with us doctors', he said, 'go on flying, but mind, don't go above the stratosphere.' How d'you like that."

Gagarin grew tense and nervous. Presently the doctor appeared in the doorway.

"Gagarin, isn't it?" he said with a smile.

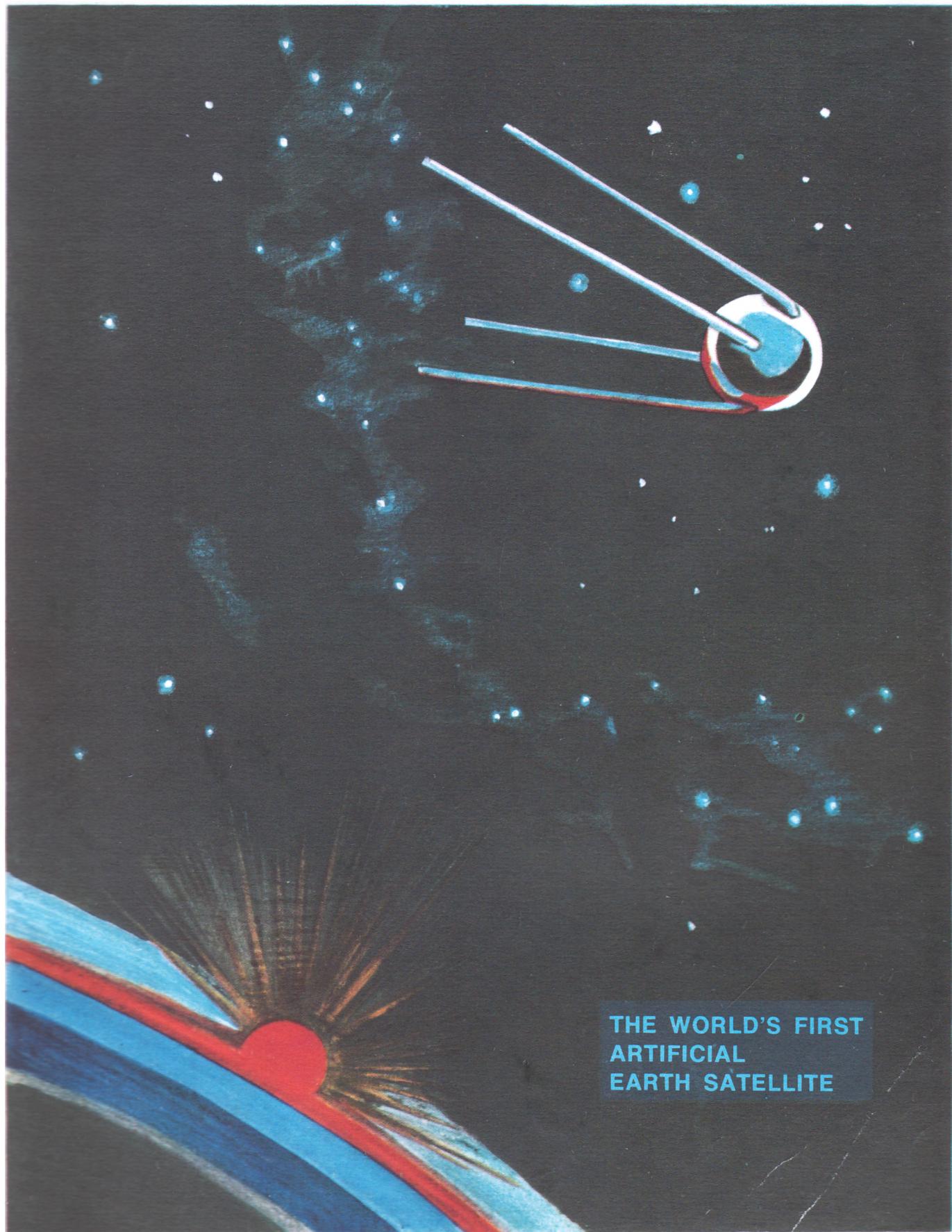
"That's me," Yuri jumped to his feet and, looking at the doctor pleadingly, asked in a trembling voice, "What about me?"

"You? You're alright. You can well fly into space."

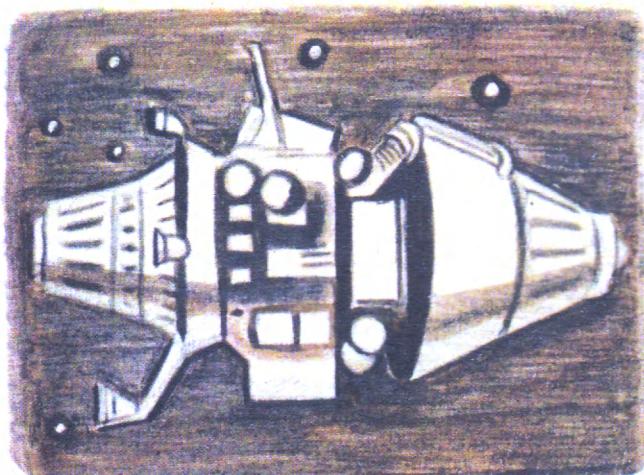
THE COSMONAUTS' TEAM

Every morning began with an hour's special exercises under medical observation. Then by bus they would go to research centres. Their lecturers were the most eminent scientists. The future space-pilots studied the construction of spaceships and their equipment. They were taught astronomical orientation. Besides, they were to be prepared for huge overloads, or G-loads, as they are called in "space language".

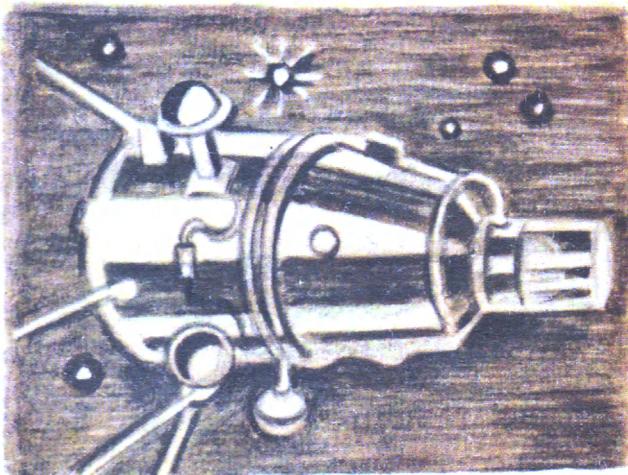
The pilots had already experienced them at great altitudes. But that was in an airplane. In space, however, things would be much



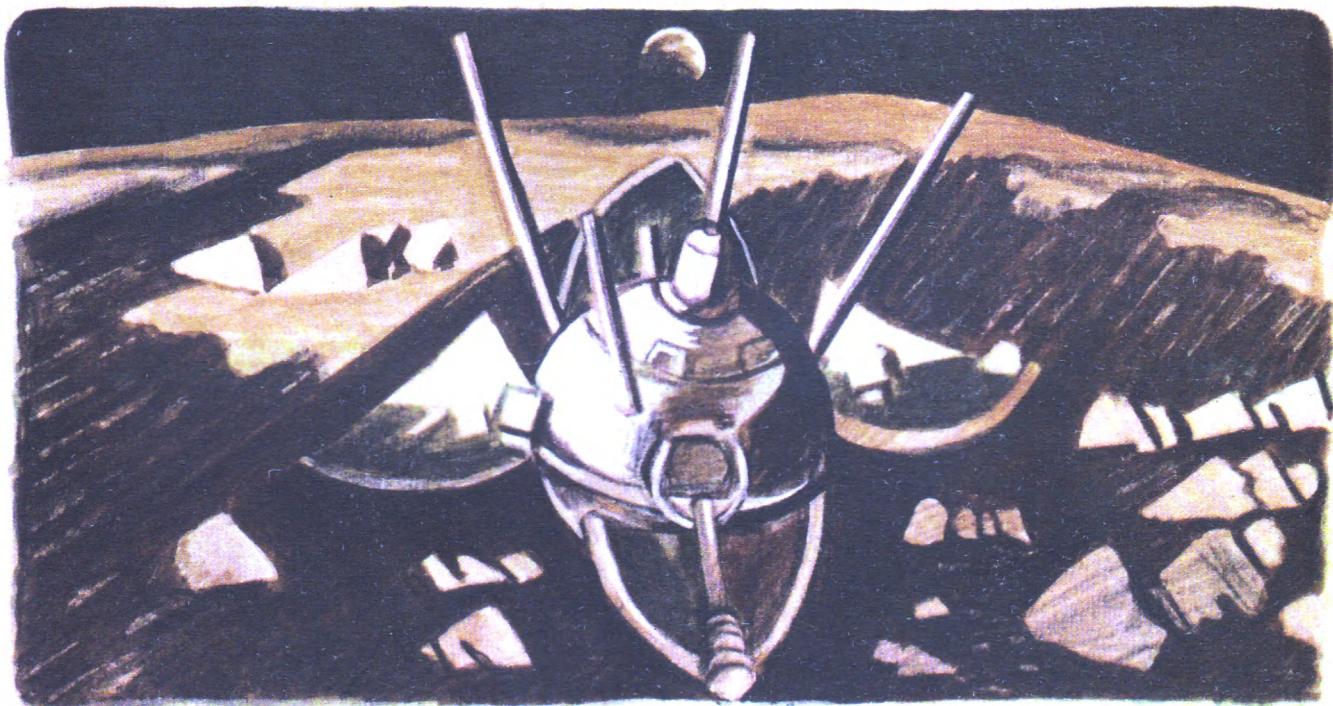
THE WORLD'S FIRST
ARTIFICIAL
EARTH SATELLITE



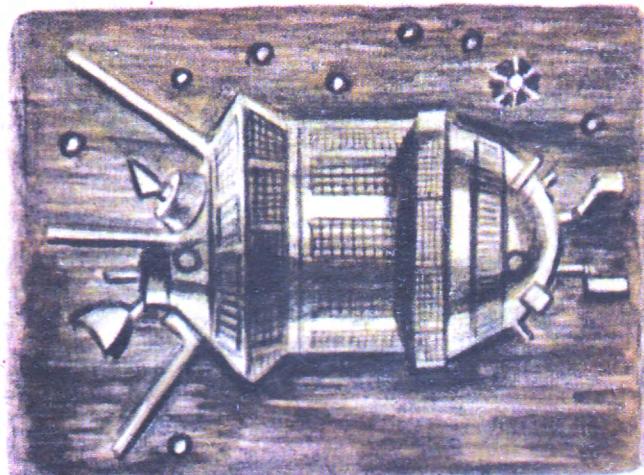
LUNA-12 SPACE PROBE



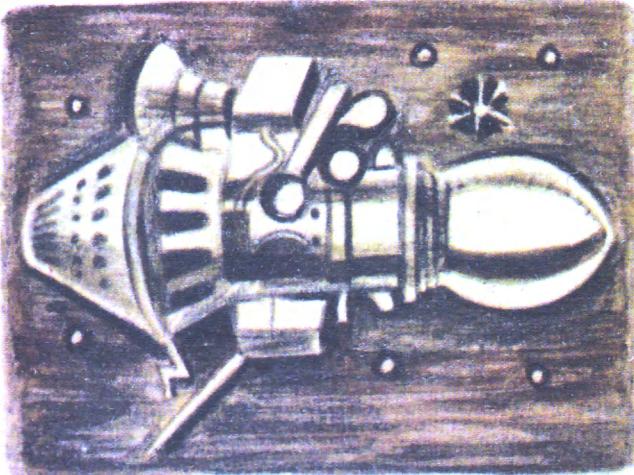
THE FIRST MAN-MADE ARTIFICIAL LUNAR SATELLITE



LUNA-9 SPACE PROBE



LUNA-3 SPACE PROBE



LUNA-13 SPACE PROBE

LUNOKHOD-1
MOON-ROVER





THE BOOSTER
ROCKET
FOR COSMOS
SATELLITES

LUNA—16
SPACE PROBE





*Gagarin at a practice session
in the cosmonauts' team*



*Training ejection of the pilot's
seat*

more difficult. The spaceship would have to overcome the downward pull of gravity and leave the stratosphere, that is, the Earth's highest layer of air. G-loads would be far heavier up there. So they must keep on training.

At first, they were tested in centrifuges. They were put into a chamber, which then began to revolve at high speed. The higher the speed, the greater the force pushing the cosmonaut back into his seat.

But he couldn't just sit there, doing nothing. He had to read and report the figures on the screen which hung in front of him. The cabin would spin faster and faster. The cosmonaut could hardly move his lips. He would feel terribly dizzy. The pressure grew heavier and heavier.

"How d'you feel?" a voice would crackle in the earphones.

"Excellent," the cosmonaut would reply.

Another training device was a surdochamber. There was dead silence there, just like in space. A cosmonaut would have to stay in the chamber for several days at a time. It took a lot of getting used to. After all, he was a human being. He loved to listen to the trees rustling, birds chirping, brooks babbling. Everybody loves to. But here it was so different.

A silence like that can drive you mad. You are alone in the whole Universe. Naturally, you are seized with fear. You just cannot help it.

When still in that unusual hospital, Gagarin had made friends with Alexei Leonov, who was later to become the first man to walk into space. Now, on their way to the training centre Leonov joked,

"D'you remember a poem by Barto about two kids who're such friends they are always together? Just like you and me."





Gagarin studying
radio equipment



Before a parachute jump



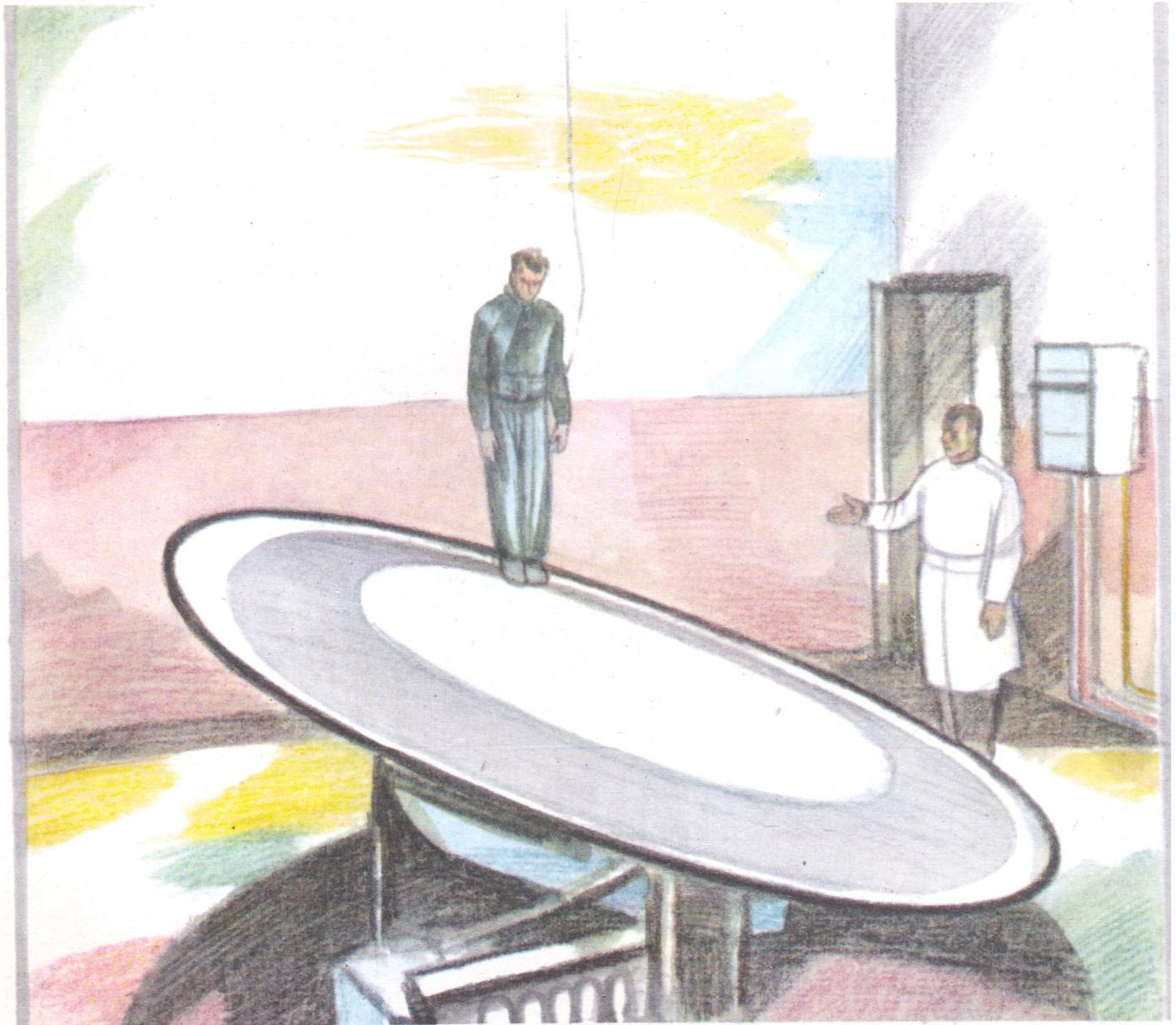




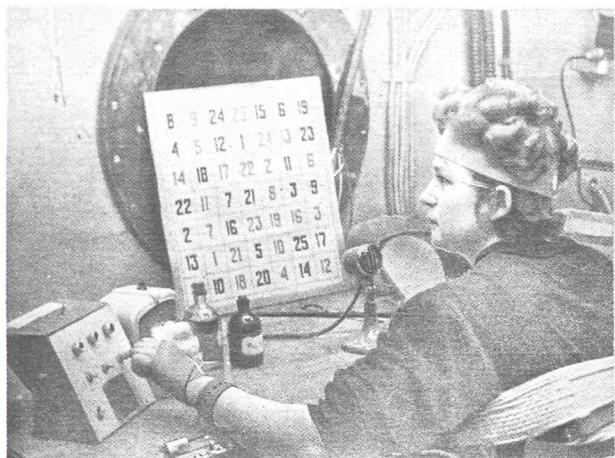
Practising a splashdown



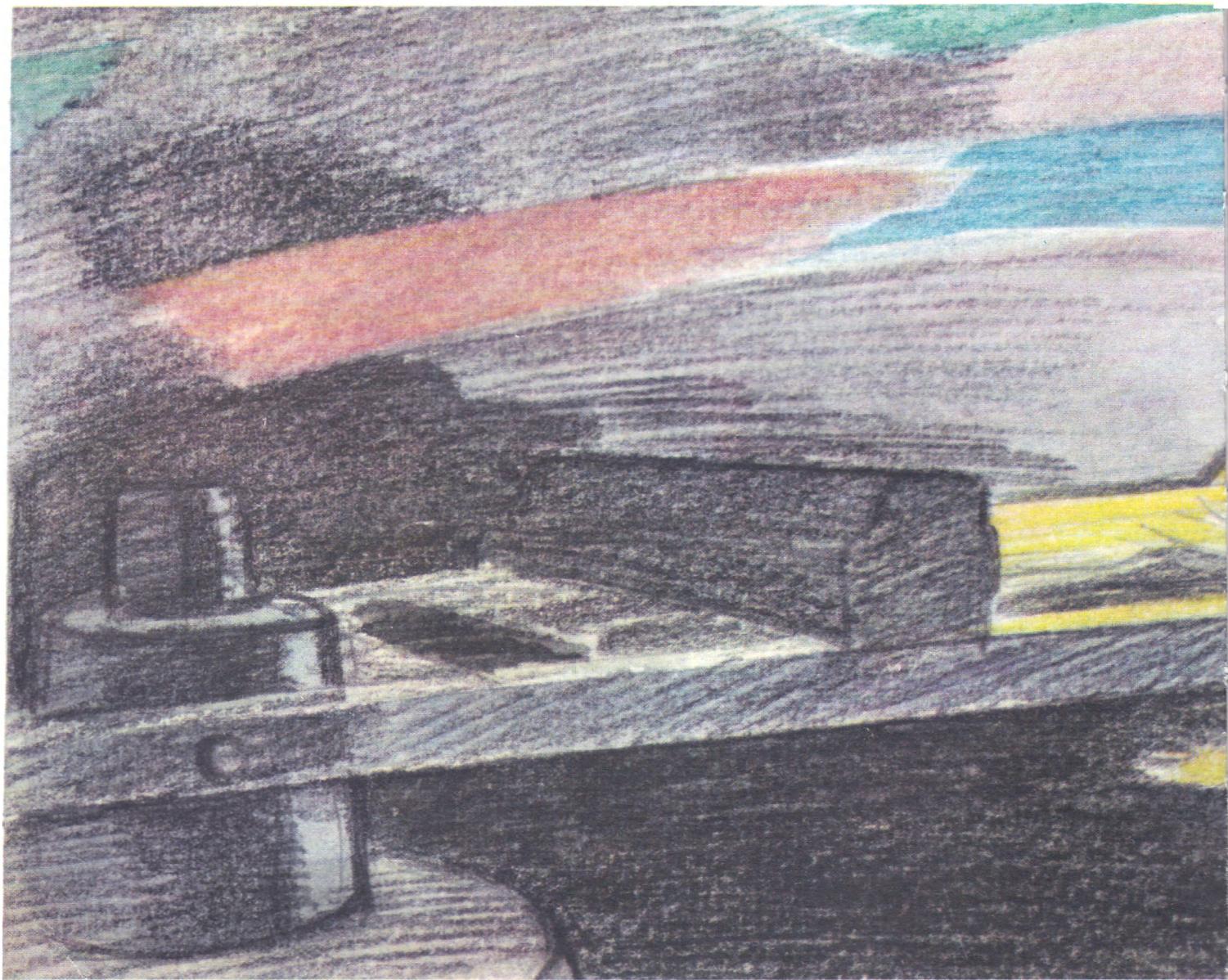
At a practice session

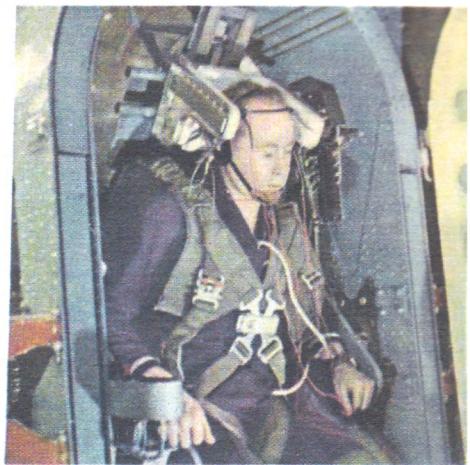
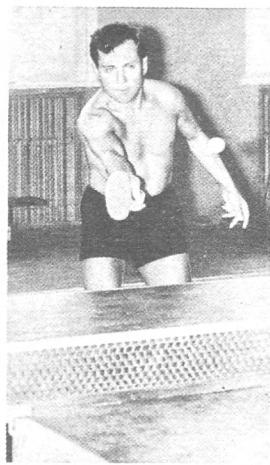
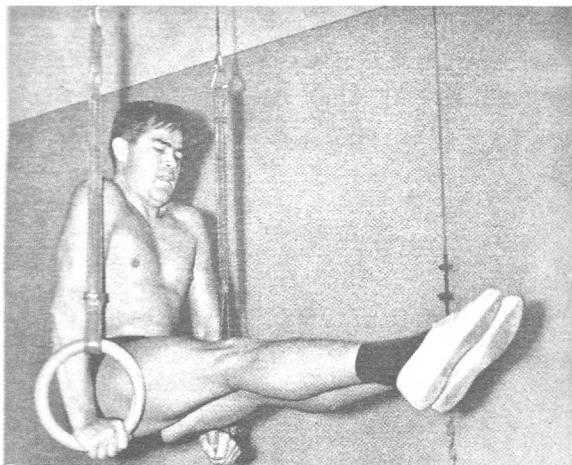




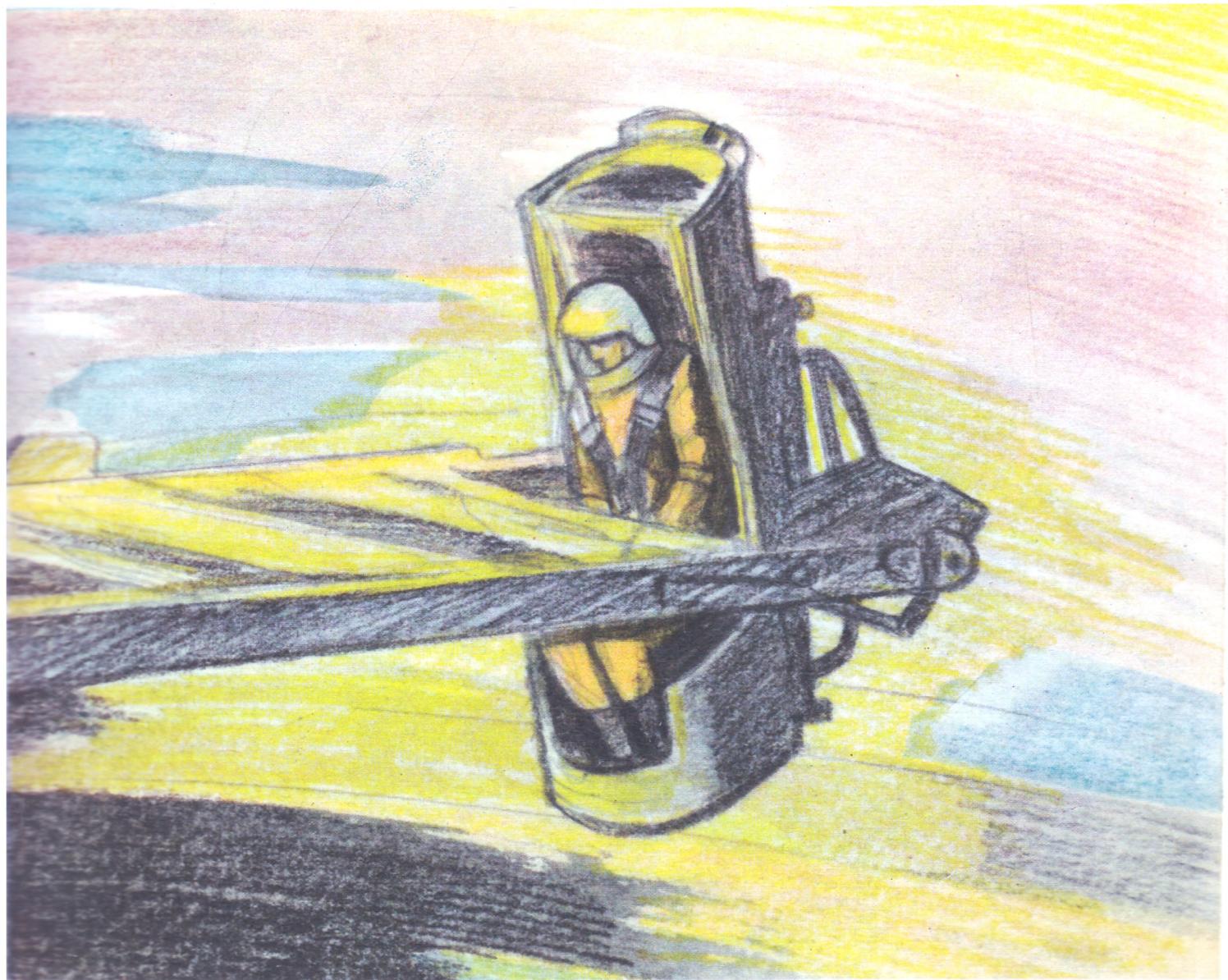


Before he took the pilot's seat in the cabin of the Vostok spaceship, Yuri Gagarin, like his fellow-cosmonauts, learned to





operate the sophisticated equipment of the spaceship and to pilot a supersonic aircraft; he also went through tests in centrifuges, pressure chambers, surdochambers. And of course, he went in for sports and parachute jumping.



Yuri laughed heartily. One of the pilots turned round and said, "Seems to me, G-loads have no effect on you, Yuri. They only make you even more cheerful."

"Strange thing, with me it's quite different," remarked Andrian Nikolayev. "I can't stand the thermochamber. It's so terribly hot there."

"Want a tip?" Gagarin responded readily. "Take me, for example. You know, I'm terribly fond of a steam-bath, so when I have to go to the thermochamber I just say to myself, 'Here I'm going to have a good steaming.'"

"With a towel and all, eh?" Pavel Popovich put in gaily.

"Why not. But of course, it's only in my head."

"There, you see, Andrian. So, what you lack is just a bit of imagination. How about your towel, eh?" And the friends burst into laughter.

"Funny as it all may seem, it's really tough, these chambers and everything. It used to be a lot easier when I think of my flights in the atmosphere," said Andrian.

For some time they were silent. In a way Andrian was right. Certainly it was much easier to fly in the atmosphere.

"Well, certainly space is no trifling matter, lads. But we must conquer it, and we will after all. Is there any obstacle a pilot can't overcome," Yuri said resolutely.

"Space... space..." Gherman Titov drawled pensively. "It's quite a riddle, this space. I'd do anything to just have a peep at it."

On the following day Gagarin brought a volume of Tsiolkovsky's works from the library. His friends were in the room. Without a word he sat down and started to read the chapter, which described how man would travel through space. Hardly had half an hour passed when an argument started. Some agreed with the scientist's projects, others tried to prove that he was wrong. It became noisy. The book passed from one to another. At length Pavel Belyaev exclaimed,

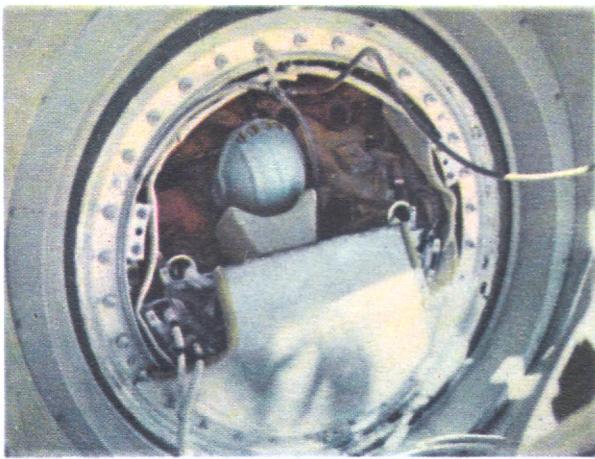
"Well done, my boy. It's wonderful the way you've managed to excite us."

But suddenly his face twitched with pain and he lowered himself heavily into an armchair. His leg still hurt. But never mind, he was not dismissed from the cosmonauts' team and that was the great thing. If it hadn't been for Yuri, things would have been quite different.

Belyaev had been practising a free-fall jump, not opening his parachute until the last minute. The jump was good, but he failed to land properly because of the strong wind. The result was that his leg was in a plaster cast for a long time. The doctors believed he wouldn't be able to train any more.

"It can't be so," Gagarin would say. "He will jump, you wait and see."





*The cabin of the
Vostok spaceship*



*Valentina Tereshkova,
the world's first woman
to fly into space,
after a parachute jump*

Won't you, Pavel?"

"I sure will," Belyaev would confirm, but deep in his heart he had his doubts: what if the doctors were right. It was then that Gagarin suggested they jump together. And sure enough, Belyaev made a perfect jump. Yuri ran up to congratulate him. It was only then that Belyaev realised that all along Yuri had been aware of his doubts.

"Yuri, you're a real friend," was all he could say.

Soon they were summoned before Sergei Korolyov, the chief designer of the spaceships. He wanted to acquaint himself with the future space pilots.

The chief designer studied them for a moment. How young and cheerful they were. He smiled and said simply, "Very pleased to meet you. Korolyov." He paused for a little, then suddenly narrowed his eyes and looked up. "Well, my good boys, d'you know what you're going to ride?"

There was a prolonged silence, during which the young men looked from one to another, embarrassed. At last one of them sitting in front, evidently the boldest one, said, "Well, we have an idea, but frankly..." and he shrugged.

Korolyov looked up and caught his smile. It was such a charming, appealing smile that he couldn't help returning it. What lively, mischievous eyes this boy had.

"You certainly aren't going to fly planes here. It'll be very



Sergei Korolyov and Yuri Gagarin

different. I mean equipment and craft, of course. And this time, a good way above the atmosphere you're so used to. That's how it will be, lads." Korolyov chuckled and, catching their curious, excited eyes, added, "And now I'd like us to think a little together. You'll soon understand how this'll help our work."

And he set about enlarging on his idea.

"And when could we see the starship?" again the blue-eyed pilot put in.

Korolyov suggested they go down to the assembly shop and take a look at the so-much-talked-of spaceships, adding, "Men make pots, men'll have to fire them. You'll soon find that out for yourselves. I mean you're the first to try to handle these ships."

Then everyone made for the hangar. Korolyov led them to the starship and said with a smile, "Well, any volunteers to try the seat?"

There was a short silence. Again, the blue-eyed pilot, pale with excitement, frowned in a business-like manner, and asked briskly,

"May I?"

Korolyov nodded his consent.

Suddenly, Gagarin, for it was him, sat down on the floor, took off his shoes and, with his socks on, nimbly mounted the step-ladder leading to the spaceship's entry hatch. Taking hold of a bracket and hauling himself easily by his arms, he flung his body through the hatch and landed straight in the pilot's seat.

"Oh, he's a lad, he is!" Korolyov said to himself and chuckled. "That's how they take off their shoes in Russian villages when they go in a house." He liked this young self-confident senior-lieutenant.

His assistants liked Yuri too. One of them caught Korolyov's eye and nodded toward Gagarin.

"He's smart, isn't he?"

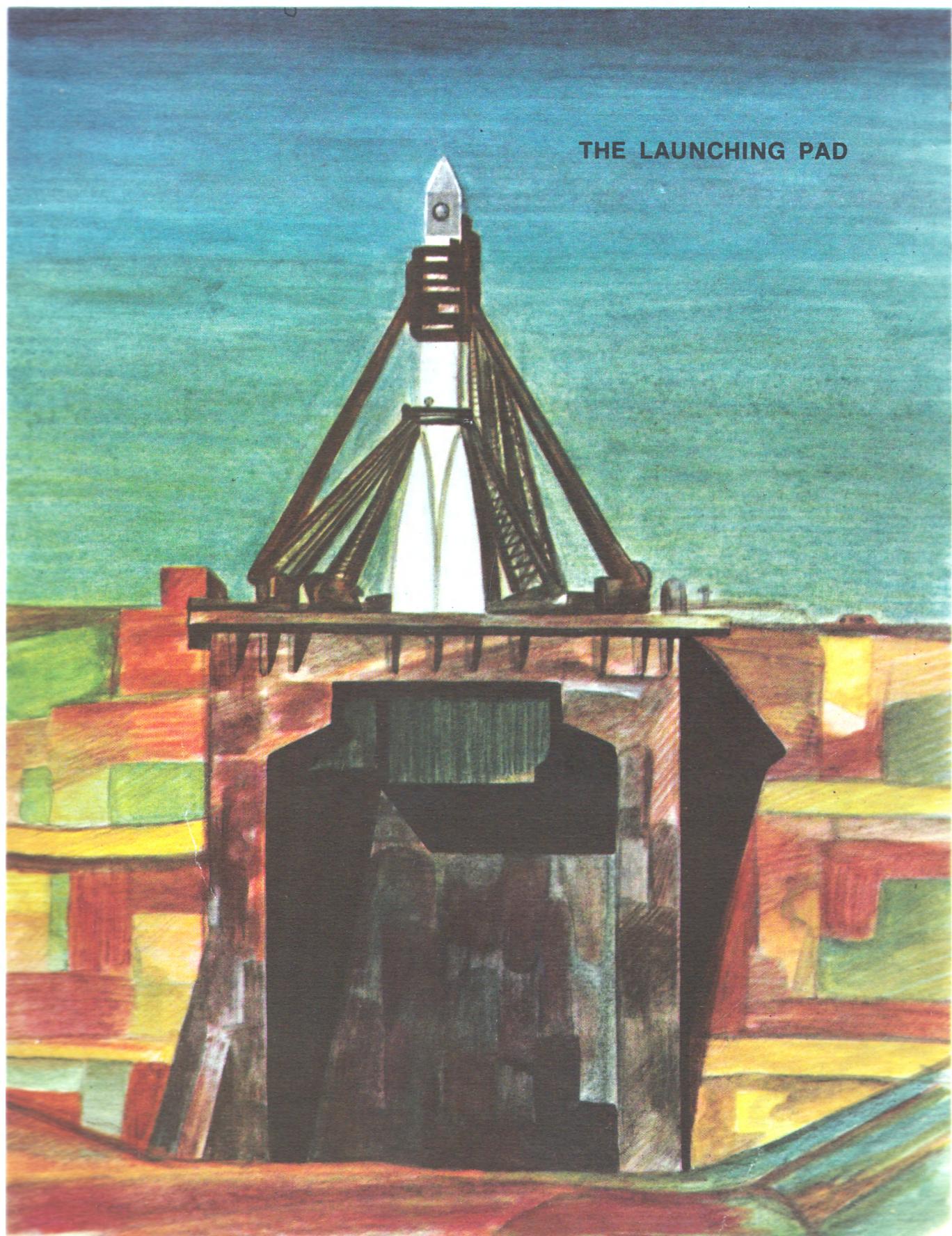
The chief designer took him by the elbow and whispered:

"He'll probably be the first to fly."

ON THE LAUNCHING PAD

There was flat, bare steppe all around them, as far as the eye could see. Wherever one looked there was nothing but the blue sky above. Even the sun here was not a typical sun. It was much bigger and lower. In the morning its crimson head rolled up from behind the frosty mist and lingered above the skyline.

THE LAUNCHING PAD



Nearing the launch area, the cosmonauts spotted a snow-white spire looming over the steppe in the distance. It was the rocket.

* * *

The rocket is supported by four powerful steel arms. They hold it down until the engines reach full thrust. As soon as the rocket begins to rise above the pad the arms fly back and release it. It is like a giant flower opening its petals. That's probably why this supporting device was nicknamed "tulip" at the Cosmodrome.

Touching the very top of the rocket are four masts, the cable mast and the three umbilical ones. The cable mast supplies electricity to the rocket, while the three others fuel.

Deep down, below the pad, under the ground there are fuelling, heating and refrigeration systems and other important and complicated installations.

The Cosmodrome area is very large. It would take you at least a day to walk around it. Though, you can have a good view of it from the helicopter. The future space pilots saw it from a car. They were shown round the whole launch area. Gagarin and his friends were full of admiration. Everything was so amazing, so fantastic.

"One will always be greatful to those who created this beautiful complex," Gagarin kept saying.

THE LAUNCHING

The next morning there was to be the test launching. The cosmonauts were excited. They had never yet seen such a rocket take off. After all, they were soon to fly these ships into space.

They were taken to an observation post, a kilometer from the launching pad. The members of the State Commission assembled in the blockhouse, not far from the spot where the rocket stood. The chief designer was there too. Everybody took their place at periscope viewers to see what was happening to the huge booster rocket.

It takes a lot of skill to launch a spaceship. Everything must be timed down to the last second. Commands are given by radio so that they can be heard in every corner of the Cosmodrome. This is called "loud communication".



THE VOSTOK SPACESHIP
SETS OUT
ON ITS SKYWARD
JOURNEY



THE FIRST-STAGE
ENGINES
SEPARATE FROM
THE SPACESHIP



THE CONE
DROPS AWAY,
THE SECOND-STAGE
ENGINES
BEGIN TO SEPARATE
FROM THE SHIP

But first of all, the rocket is fuelled. As soon as the tanks are filled, there is a lot of steam and the rocket seems to be clad in a snowy blanket. The job completed, a motor trolley pulls the service-cisterns away.

Meanwhile, electric current is already running through the cable mast and starts machines and the turbo-pump unit.

What's that, you may well wonder. Why, it's very important. It is the turbo-pump unit that forces the fuel to the combustion chambers.

Time ticks away. There are now only 15 minutes to lift-off. All those who haven't got any urgent things to do are requested to leave the launching pad. The fire-brigades stand ready, waiting.

The pad empties. The last car whizzes past and disappears. Look, the service masts noiselessly draw back. The huge rocket held tight in its scaffolding seems to breathe and shine with a mysterious light, ready to leap into the bright-blue sky.

Commands follow one after another, repeated by the launch operators.

"Key to launch!" the count-down director orders.

"Key to launch!" echo the control-panel operators.

The rocket has already stopped steaming. Its hatch is airtight sealed.

"Launch!" comes the command.

Back goes the cable mast, and powerful jets of water spurt up from beneath the rocket. They must stop the fierce flame bursting from the bell-shaped nozzles. Otherwise, the heat would quickly turn the metal constructions to liquid.

"Ignition!"

At this command the huge bulk of the rocket gives a mighty shudder. A terrible rumble is growing inside it, changing to a deafening din.

"Pre-stage!"

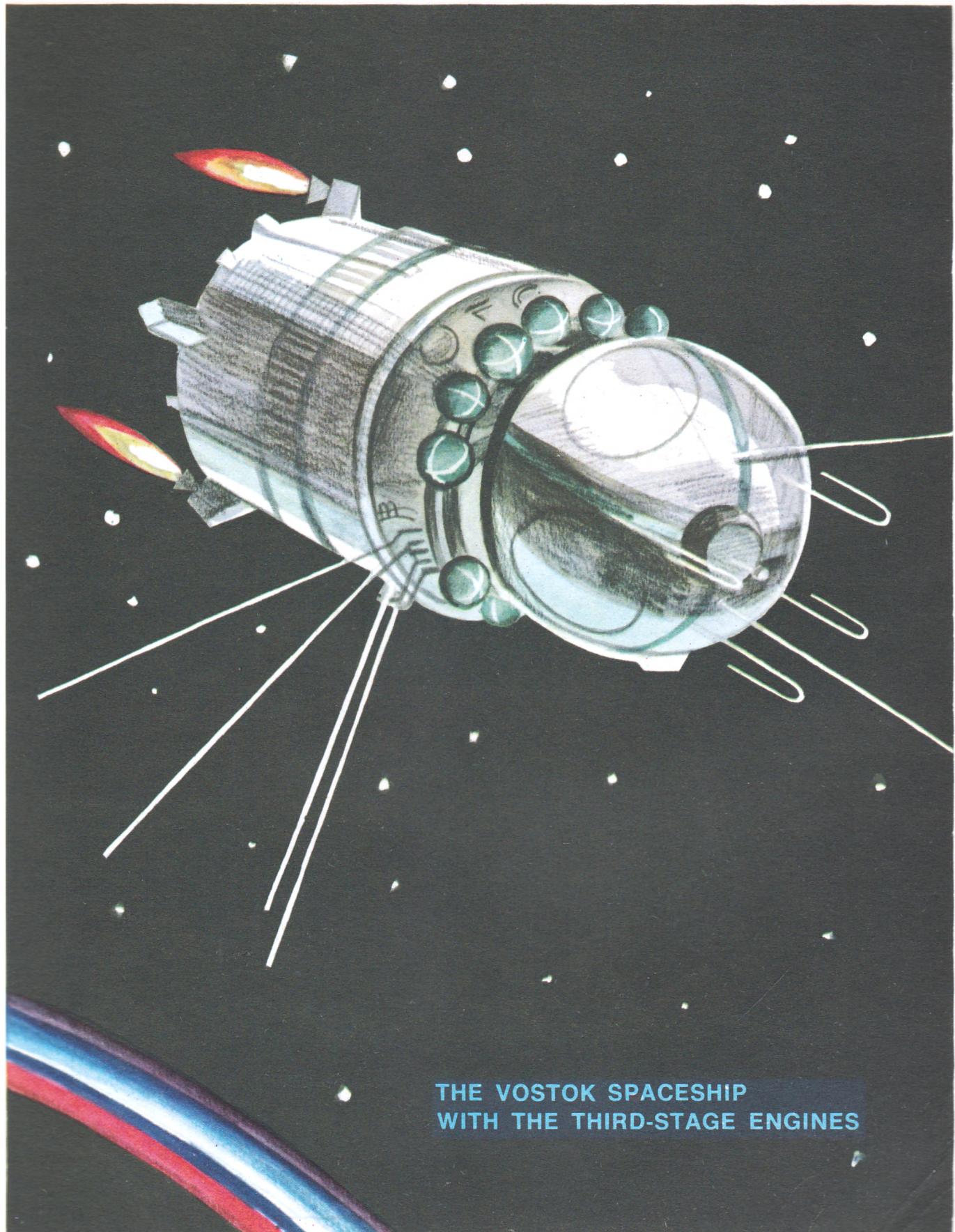
Now the fuel rushes headlong from the tanks to the ignition chambers. On and on it runs along the tubes, but there is one more valve on its way. The last one. A while longer and it will open but not until the turbine comes up to full thrust. There is a special device there that switches on the valve, so as to let the fuel in with as much force as possible.

"Main stage!"

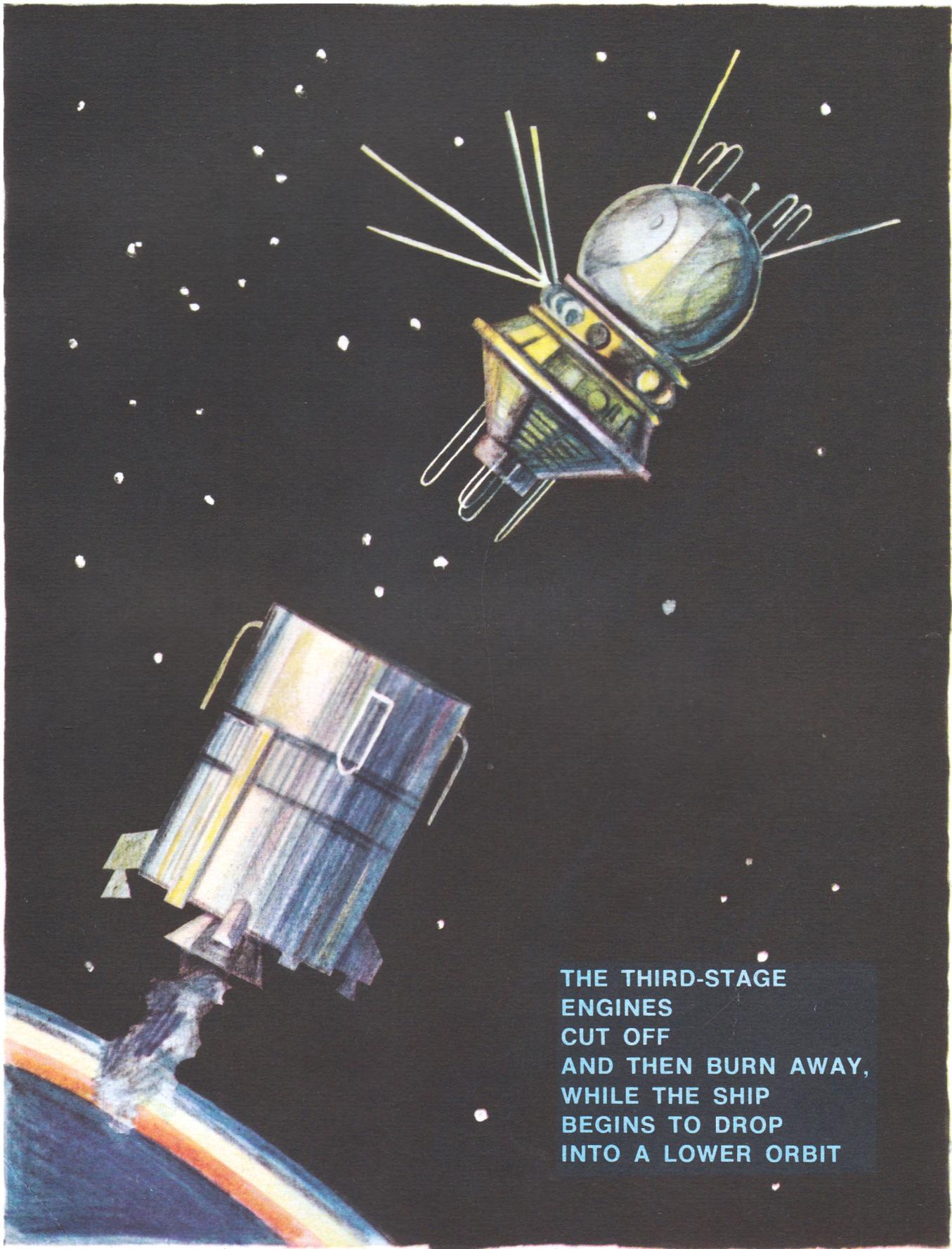
There it is! In headlong fury tons of fuel rush into the chambers, where the fire is storming. Flames gush out of the nozzles with incredible force and the roaring of thunder that shakes the earth and tears the air asunder.

You can well imagine how excited the cosmonauts were.

"Lift!" came the last command.

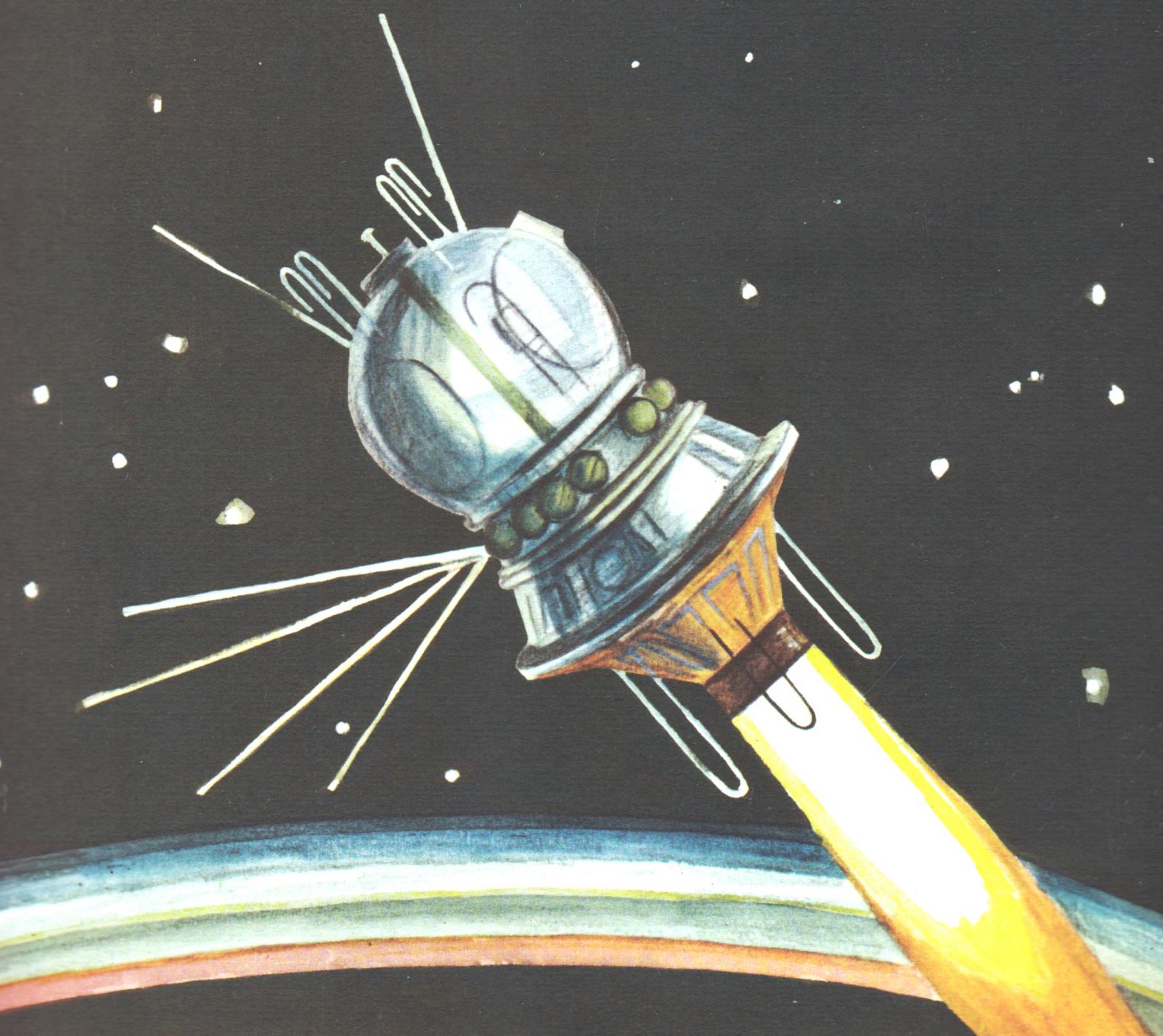


THE VOSTOK SPACESHIP
WITH THE THIRD-STAGE ENGINES

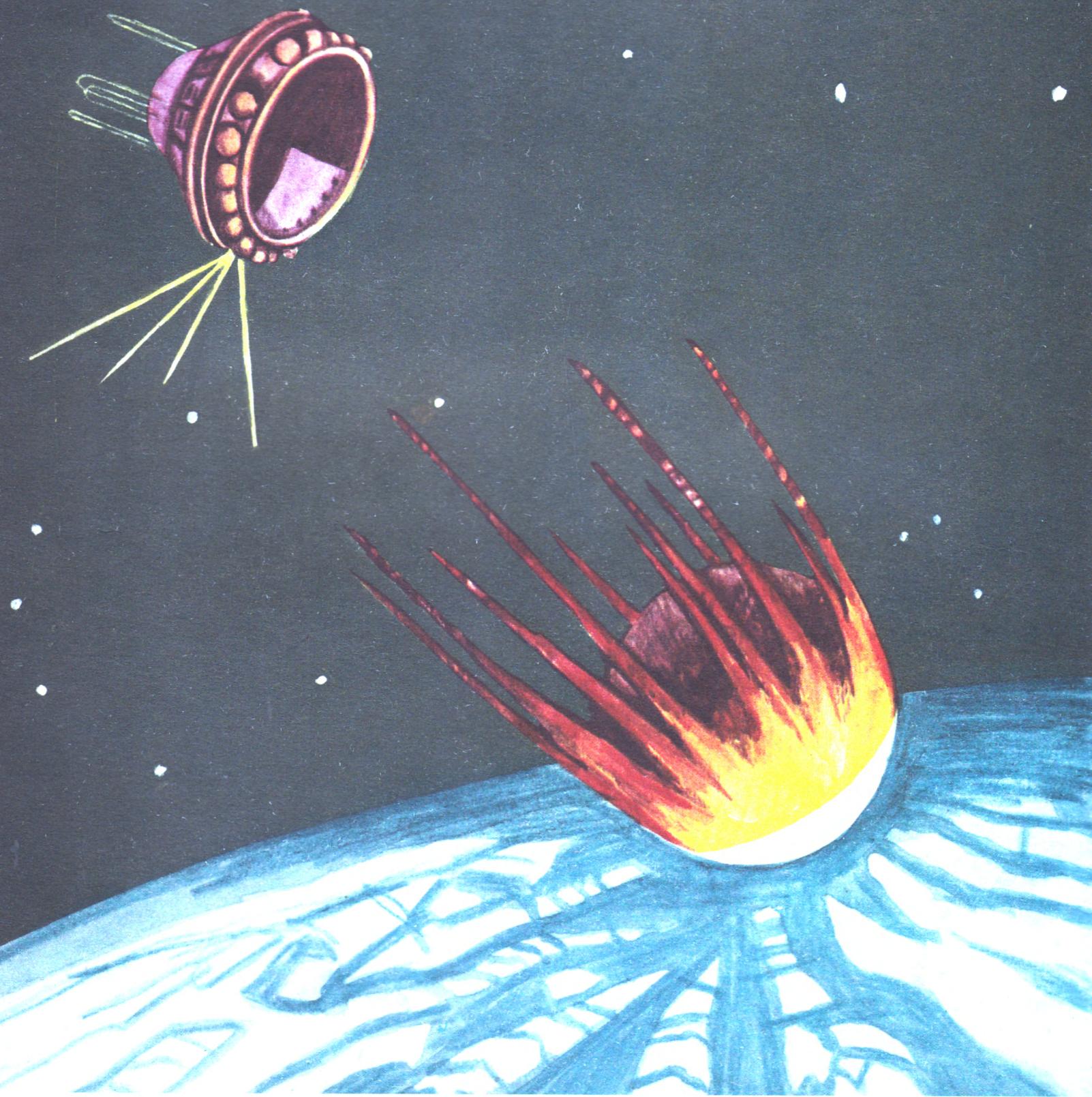


THE THIRD-STAGE
ENGINES
CUT OFF
AND THEN BURN AWAY,
WHILE THE SHIP
BEGINS TO DROP
INTO A LOWER ORBIT

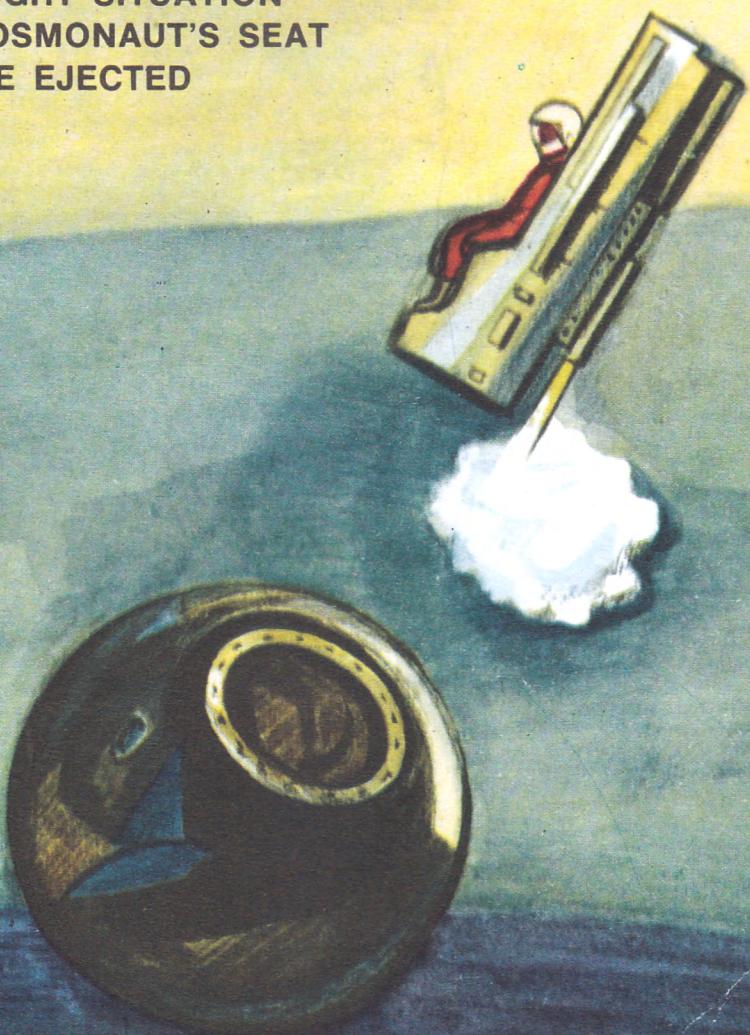
AFTER A 108 MINUTES RACE
AROUND THE WORLD
THE VOSTOK SPACESHIP
SLOWS DOWN A LITTLE
AND HEADS FOR THE EARTH



THE INSTRUMENT MODULE
DETACHES FROM THE SHIP.
THE HEAT SHIELD
REACHES TEMPERATURES
OF THOUSANDS OF DEGREES



**IN A TIGHT SITUATION
THE COSMONAUT'S SEAT
MAY BE EJECTED**

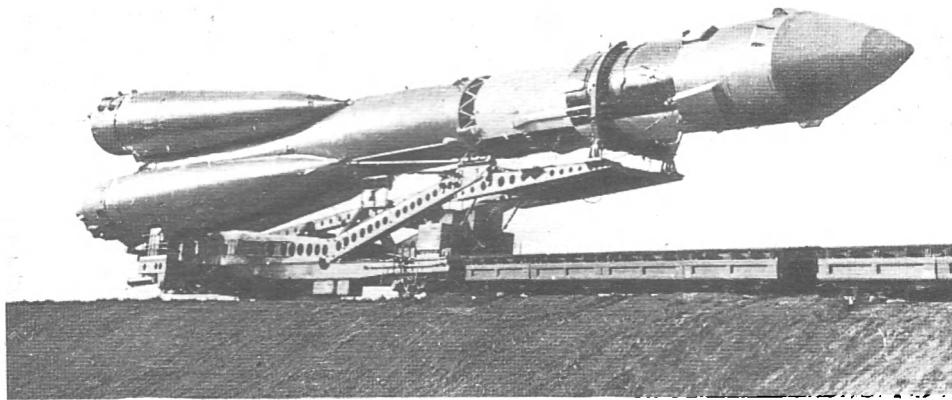




THE RE-ENTRY VEHICLE
TOUCHES DOWN



THE COSMONAUT'S
LANDING IN CASE OF
EMERGENCY EJECTION



On leaving the assembly shop, the spaceship is moved to the launching pad

Enveloped in white smoke and orange flame, the rocket began slowly and somewhat reluctantly to lift itself off the pad. Back flung the holdown arms. The next moment the starship shot up and out of sight. Only a blazing dot could be seen for some time.

Astounded, stunned and deafened, Gagarin didn't even feel somebody shaking him by the shoulder.

"Well? How was it?" one of the engineers he knew shouted in his ear.

Yuri only shook his head.

"Amazing!" he exclaimed, recovering from a moment's shock. "It's just terrific. She's like a living thing. You all did a wonderful job. Congratulations."

"Well, soon we'll give you a push into space in the same way."

"Oh, wouldn't that be tremendous!" Gagarin said with a sigh and then smiled, "You know, I felt as if I was already sitting there inside her."

LANDING AT BAIKONUR

The plane was coming in to land. Houses, trees and roads came closer and closer. It was not long before it touched down and, skidding along the tarmac strip, came to a stop in front of the airport building.

"We've arrived!" Gagarin said, stretching himself in his seat and catching Popovich's cheery eye.

"Hooray for Baikonur!" his friend exclaimed. Everyone laughed.

A crowd was waiting for them: members of the State Commission, scientists, engineers, newsmen. Gagarin spotted the chief designer at once. Standing beside him was the chief cosmonautical theoretician.

With a light, almost youthful gait, General Kamanin walked down the steps and up to the chairman of the State Commission to report their arrival.

Korolyov looked the cosmonauts over. He shook hands with each young officer and found a few words for every one.

"How are things, Yuri? How's your wife and daughters?"

"Fine. They send you their best regards," Gagarin said with a grin.

"Indeed! Even the little one? How d'you like that! She can't even talk."

But Gagarin was not one to be put off so easily.

"Why, she just waved her hand. That's what she did for lack of words."

Korolyov took the general aside and, dropping his voice to a whisper, inquired, "Well, can you tell me who's to be the first?"

"Frankly, I haven't decided yet," Kamanin sighed heavily. "Well, this is some problem."

"It sure is. Anyway, you'd better hurry up about it. Let's think together, then."

"All right," The general saluted and, executing a smart turnabout, withdrew.

The cosmonauts were waiting for him in the bus. As soon as he got in, the bus set off. A minute later ever cheerful Pavel Popovich began to sing an old Ukrainian song:

A falcon is hovering high in the sky,
And, marvelling, I just sigh:
I wish I could take to the air and fly
Just like that falcon there up high.

"Look, Sir," Gagarin remarked to Kamanin with a touch of irony. "He's asking permission for a space flight. That's what he is hinting at. I'm sure of it. I know his little tricks."

Everyone laughed. Popovich himself couldn't help laughing. He laughed so heartily that tears welled into his eyes.

"You little devil! Having a dig at me, are you?" he exclaimed, slapping his friend on the shoulder.

The general also smiled, but his mind was still on the problem.

"Which one of them..." he was thinking. "Which one of them is to be the first to fly into space?"

THE CHIEF DESIGNER

Night fell on Baikonur. The residential area of the Cosmodrome had long become quiet. The cosmonauts were asleep in a cosy hotel. The only window lit in the night was the one in the chief designer's study. He had just returned from the assembly shop. The positioning of the module on the rocket had gone smoothly.

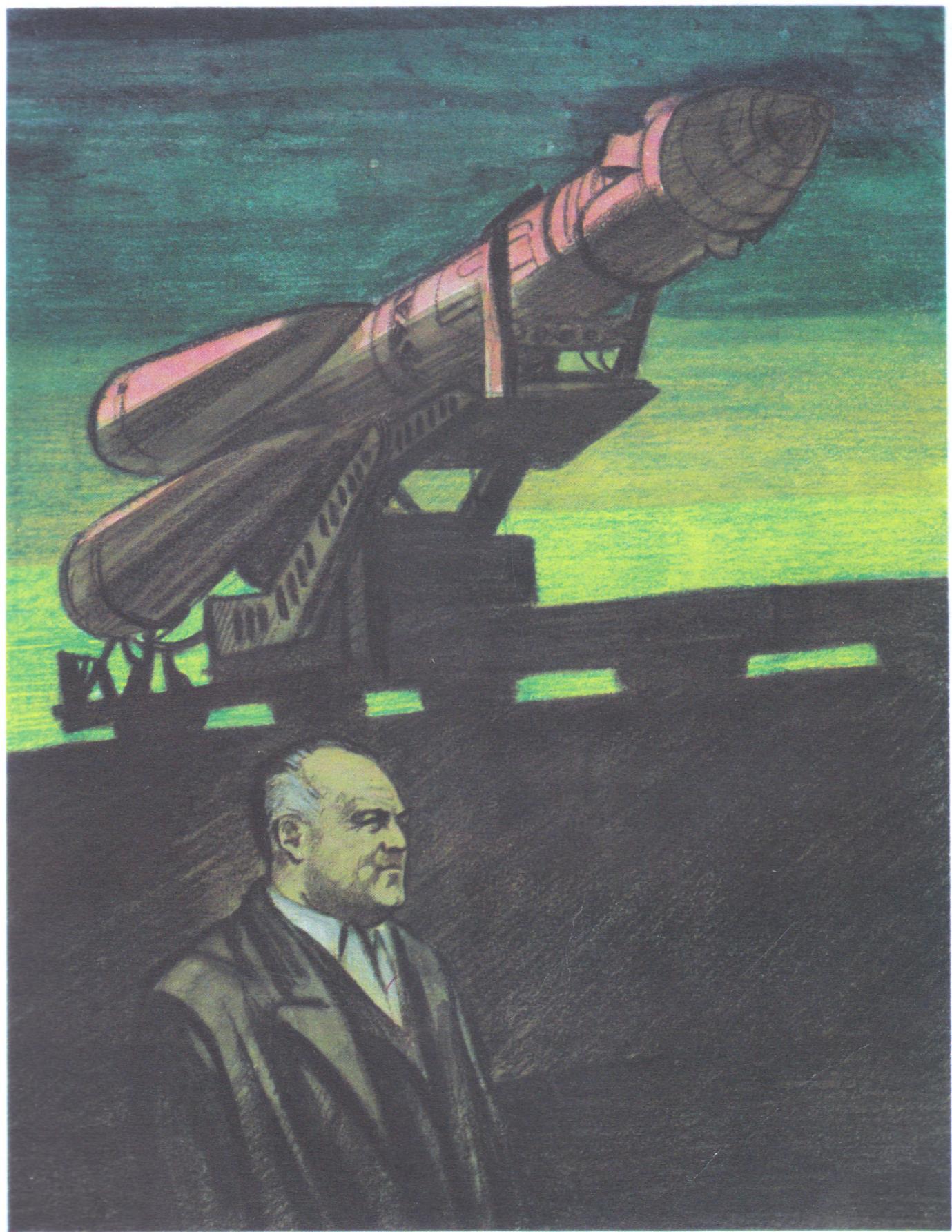
Outside, the steppe wind sang loud and scratched, tossing the sand against the window-panes. Korolyov went up to the window and looked out. Faraway in the distance, above the launching pad, the searchlights were sweeping the night sky. A motor-trolley was buzzing. Work was in full swing there.

Korolyov folded his arms on his chest, then abruptly put his hands into his pockets. When he was nervous, he never knew what to do with his hands. He had good reason to be nervous. In several days a man would fly into space. Unheard of! He paced up and down his study, then abruptly sat down at the table.

"Space... What awaits man there? There's no force up there that can pull a stone on a string. The stone and the string will swim there alongside. Man, too, will go tumbling about, just like a bird, only without wings. He will float in the dark abyss, without knowing which way is up or down. A bit of fluff will easily catch up with a rock up there if they are pushed away in the same direction. A sinister tomb-like silence reigns in space. There's no air up there, so there can't be any vibrations to produce sound. One will never hear stars explode, nor flaming plasma boil. Two meteorites as big as mountains may collide and crumble to dust somewhere behind your back, but you wouldn't even notice it. You'll never hear anything up there."

"Space... How'll man feel there? Will he be able to live there and work? Will he retain his courage and self-control or will fear enter his heart? There is no telling. Nobody has a first-hand knowledge of outer space yet. The one who flies first will have to answer all these questions."

Korolyov wearily rubbed his temples. What kind of a man does it take not only to venture into outer space but also to be able to return safe and sound from his journey to tell people what he has seen! He must face the unknown and come out the winner.



THE FIRST COSMONAUT

A few hours later the members of the State Commission assembled for a meeting. Among those present were scientists, engineers, technicians, reporters and cameramen. The pilots had been invited too.

The chairman announced the decision of the Soviet government to undertake the launching of a man into space. When he finished speaking, the hall shook with tumultuous applause and cheers.

One after another the designers reported that the spaceship's systems were ready for launch. Then the flight plan was discussed and approved. The ship would orbit the earth and then land. Just one orbit for now.

Then General Kamanin was given the floor. He cleared his throat and began to speak. He said that a few pilots had been selected for the training programme but now one had to be chosen for the actual flight. He paused for a moment, and then announced, "I propose that senior-lieutenant Gagarin be assigned for the flight and that his standby should be Gherman Titov."

"Any other proposals, comrades?" the chairman asked and, casting a quick glance at Korolyov, added, "What's your opinion, Sergei Pavlovich?"

For some time Korolyov sat silent, mechanically rolling his pencil and paper across the table. Everyone sensed that he had been going through some worrying hours. At last he stood up and said, "Your choice is correct. I've been keeping an eye on Gagarin for a long time. I've found him industrious. Besides, he has an analytical mind. We need all kinds of information about space, and I'm certain Gagarin will bring much back for us."

"Alright. Anyone else?" asked the chairman. "Then, let's put it to a vote." And he was the first to raise his hand.

"Passed unanimously," he concluded.

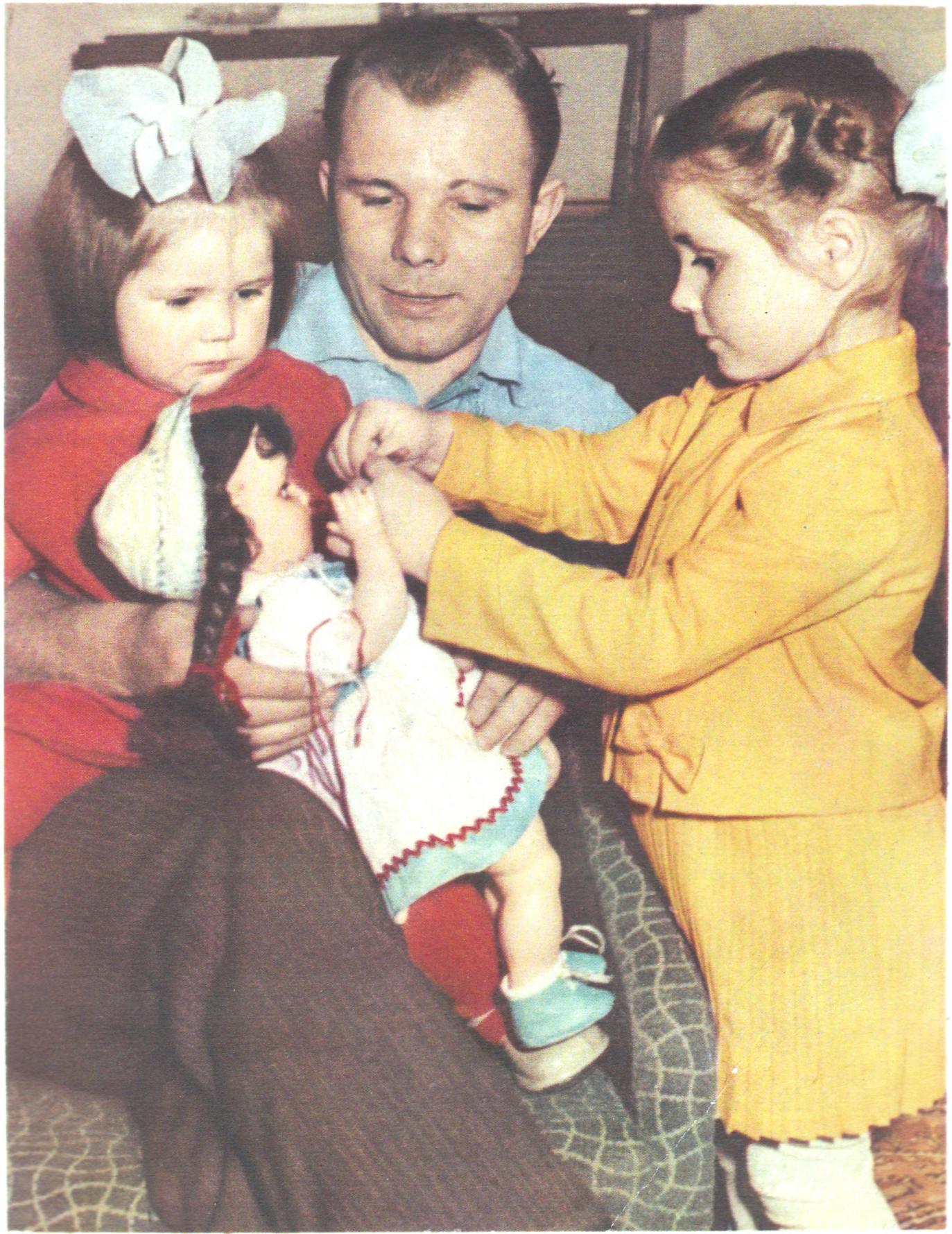
Now Gagarin's turn to speak came. He rose slowly. He was very pale. One felt how much effort it took him to hold back his emotions.

"I'm very greatful," he began firmly, "to the Party and the Government for the confidence they've shown in me. I will do my best to carry out my task."

Floodlights flashed, cameras clicked. Gagarin's friends embraced him.

Andrian Nikolayev patted him on the shoulder. "Mind you don't get big headed after your return. Don't give yourself airs."

"What d'you think I am," Yuri exclaimed, putting his arms round his friends' shoulders. "I will remain the same. Upon my word."



Yuri Gagarin with his daughters, Galya and Lena

BLAST-OFF

The day before the launch Gagarin and Titov were accommodated in a small house, not far from the launching pad. The day passed as usual: training exercises, a cross-country run, dinner and rest. Everything was planned down to the last minute. Korolyov sent some of his men to give them final instructions, after which Yuri and Gherman played billiards.

Presently Doctor Karpov appeared and interrupted the game. He took their pulse, temperatures, checked their hearts and then, having a look at his watch, said sternly, "Time to go to bed."

"To bed we go," chorused the cosmonauts gaily and made for their bedroom.

Presently they heard footsteps. In came the chief designer himself.

"Staying in the dark?" he said with a smile, looking around. "Well, a nice little place you have here. How d'you feel?"

"Fine," Gagarin and Titov replied simultaneously. "Good to see you. Will you stay awhile?"

"Think the doctor would like that?" Korolyov glanced back at the door. "There's no arguing with him, you know. Let's put it off till next time. After Yuri returns from his space journey we'll have a lot of things to talk about. Well, boys, good-night. I have so much to do. Glad to see you so full of beans. Good night."

Holding onto the doorknob, he paused for a moment and suddenly turned back.

"One more thing, lads. Don't be too stuck up about it. In a couple of years we'll be sending people into space in a simpler way."

"Oh, what d'you mean?" The cosmonauts were puzzled.

"There'll be trade-union sponsored tours," Korolyov answered.

Everyone laughed. The door opened a few inches and Doctor Karpov's head poked in.

"What's wrong, lads? Shall I give you some sleeping pills?"

"No, no! We don't need them!" cried both cosmonauts.

In a moment it was all quiet in the bedroom. When the chief designer came into the room half an hour later both were fast asleep. Gagarin was lying on his side, palm under cheek. He looked very childlike in his sleep. Korolyov stood for a while, thoughtfully looking at him, and then tiptoed out.

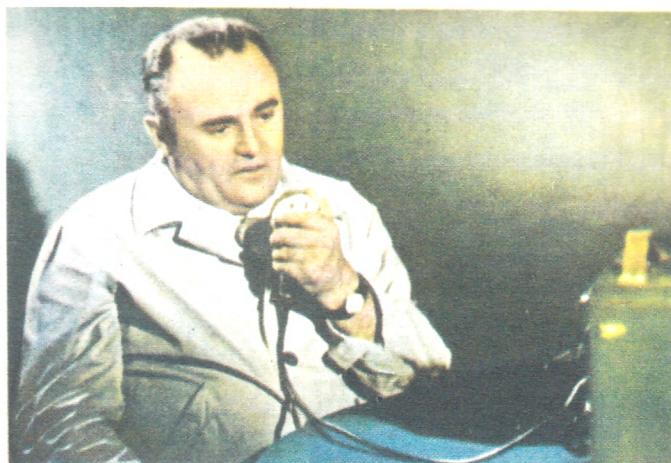
Early in the morning Gagarin and Titov were awakened by Doctor Karpov.

"How did you sleep?" he asked in a concerned voice.

"Fine, just as you taught us to," Gagarin replied, stretching and yawning.



On the way to the launching pad



Sergei Korolyov

The time had come for them to dress in their space gear. A crowd of doctors piled in. They set about checking the cosmonauts' hearts, measuring their bloodpressure, feeling their pulse. General Kamanin appeared. He wanted to know how things were going.

"I'm probably not quite normal," Gagarin whispered to him conspiratorially.

"Why's that?" the general frowned.

"The flight's today! Such a flight. Everybody's nervous. But I'm not the slightest bit worried. Not the tiniest bit, you see?"

"Oh, that's fine!" Kamanin exclaimed with a sigh of relief.

* * *

Clad in their bright-orange spacesuits, Gagarin and Titov left the house and headed for the bus. In a few minutes they were already driving to the pad.

A huge crowd had gathered there: scientists, launchmen, members of the State Commission. Gagarin walked up to the Chairman to report on the state of affairs. His standby Gherman Titov remained in the bus. He would be allowed to take off his spacesuit only after Cosmonaut Number One got into the spaceship.

Gagarin mounted the lift-platform and turned round to look at the square below. The sea of faces. It was so quiet one could hear the wind driving scraps of paper along the concrete. All had their eyes upon him.

"Dear friends, close and unknown, fellow-citizens, people of all countries and continents!" he began, and the loudspeakers carried his excited voice over the steppe. "In several minutes this powerful



starship will take me far out into the vast expanses of the Universe... Am I happy? Well, my whole life now seems to me to have been one marvellous moment. Everything I've done and lived for was for its sake. Now that I think about the responsibility that falls upon me, the responsibility of being the first to accomplish what many a generation of people have dreamed of, that is, to blaze the trail into outer space, I want to dedicate my first space flight to the people of communism. See you soon, dear friends!"

Cheers, shouts, applause went up from the crowd below. Gagarin stepped into the lift. From the top platform he waved his hand again. Everybody moved away from the rocket. Fuelling began.

Korolyov went back to the bunker. As he gave orders he kept his eyes glued to Gagarin's face on the TV screen.

"Sunrise, Sunrise... This is Cedar," he called through the microphone. "How're you, Yuri?"

"Feeling excellent. Made a final test of all equipment. All systems working fine."

"I read you. Everything's alright here too. Yuri, I hope you're not bored, are you? Shall I give you some music?"

"Music? Oh, that would be fine!"

After a while Korolyov asked again:

"Well? Is the music coming through?"

"Nothing so far."

"Huh. I know these musicians. They dither about and the whole thing is sooner said than done."

Meanwhile, the preparations were in full swing. The commands followed one after another, and, finally, the flight-director announced: "Lift-off!"

"Lift-off!"

"Good luck to you, Yuri!" the chief designer shouted into the microphone.

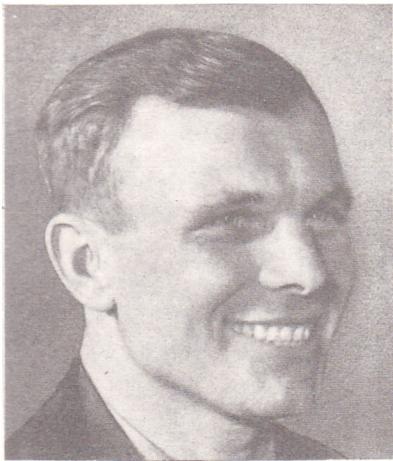
The rocket lifted itself slowly off the pad and headed into the sky. And then the powerful loudspeakers carried Gagarin's triumphant voice:

"Off we go!"

THE EARTH'S ENVOY

On April 12, 1961 the spaceship with Yuri Gagarin aboard orbited the Earth and landed safely in a field, not far from the city of Saratov.





Welcome to Moscow

It so happened that Gagarin landed in the very same area where he first learned to fly planes, as a cadet of the Saratov flying club.

It was a warm spring morning. The Volga was half a kilometer away. All around was low ground still swampy after the spring flood. Small lakes glistened here and there. The wind was bending last year's wormwood.

Stepping out onto firm ground again and looking around, Gagarin caught sight of an elderly woman and a small girl, standing near a dappled calf. The three of them were staring at him in astonishment. His bright-orange spacesuit frightened them. They had never seen the likes of it before.

Yuri went up to them and smiled.

"Hello. I'm Gagarin, the cosmonaut."

"Good Lord!" the woman gasped. "Can it be that you've come from up there!" And suddenly she burst into tears. They hugged and kissed each other like close friends.

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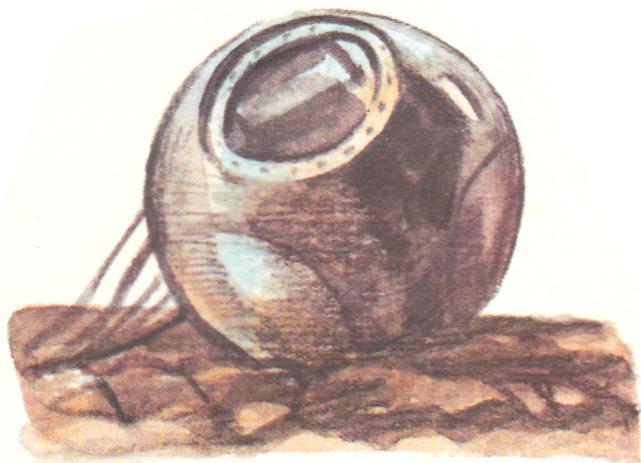
Gagarin's flight was a magnificent triumph. The world was thrilled. Radio stations kept repeating the name of the first spaceman in different languages. The words "space" and "Gagarin" were picked up by all newspapers. Gagarin's smiling face became familiar to everyone.

A special airplane brought the first cosmonaut to Moscow. The capital was jubilant. Crowds of people had gathered on Red Square. A tremendous festive meeting was held there.

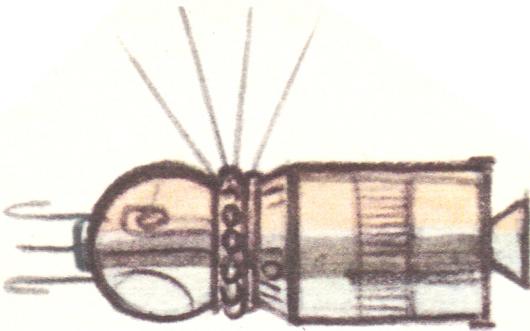
* * *

Time passed and soon people of other countries greeted Gagarin as enthusiastically.

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, India, Ceylon, Great Britain, the United States—everywhere people gave their warmest welcome to Yuri Gagarin, the first earthman to go into space.



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